Double Blind

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Summary

“Money, power, or breeding rights.”

“What?”

Will blinked, lifting his eyes to Jack, who now stood much closer with his unintroduced companion a step behind him.

“Motive,” Will replied, setting his hands to his knees to lever himself up to stand. He peeled his gloves off and wiped his palms against his jeans. “The three most likely reasons for murder are always money, power, or breeding rights.”

A story in which Will, an Omega, pretends to be a Beta in order to keep his job... and is sent "undercover" as an Omega into a traditionalist community to find a killer. With Hannibal as his generous Alpha chaperone, of course. Jack has no idea this is a double blind, but does Hannibal?

Notes

Another Fandom Trumps Hate auction win! We had so much fun with this one, we fell so deep and couldn't climb out for days and days, we hope you like it as much as our amazing auction winner did!

There *is* non-con in this, and it is between the mains, but we will warn for it prior to the chapter.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

Some days coffee wasn't enough to wake Will up in the morning.

Some days he wondered if he had more caffeine in his system than blood, and that was the reason why.

The scene wasn't anything he hadn't seen before. A murder, blood, a brutalized body; a fairly common Monday morning for Will Graham, profiler and consultant. The only unusual thing was the presence of a new Alpha, currently deep in conversation with Jack Crawford off in the corner.

Will offered the barest glance his way before returning to his scrutiny. His hands were sweaty in his gloves. *"Powdered" my ass* . He flexed his fingers and tilted his head, allowing the pendulum to swing, allowing all other sounds around him to mangle into a hiss of static.

Crime of passion, the weapons had been found at the victim's home and left behind when the killer left. Efficient albeit risky; how did the killer know there would be something of use in the house? At hand? Nearby? Had he anticipated that the victim would be home, or had their presence surprised him?

No, while the weapons were gathered on scene, the attack was premeditated. The torture on the body was too personal, too specific to have been a spur of the moment decision. A long-held vendetta, perhaps?

"Will?"

"Money, power, or breeding rights."

"What?"

Will blinked, lifting his eyes to Jack, who now stood much closer with his unintroduced companion a step behind him.

"Motive," Will replied, setting his hands to his knees to lever himself up to stand. He peeled his gloves off and wiped his palms against his jeans. "The three most likely reasons for murder are always money, power, or breeding rights."

"Our victim was unemployed," Jack pointed out slowly. Will nodded.

"Breeding rights then. Did he have a mate?"

"A courtship," Jack said. "A traditional one. Still in the early stages."

Will nodded. The early stages were public. Gifts of flowers. Meals eaten in the presence of others. Signaling that the Omega was off-market, when they weren't yet comfortable enough

to be marked or scented. Showing the Omega they were a worthy mate so the Omega would willingly move forward to the more private stages.

“There’ll be a failed courtship in his past,” Will said. “One that never got past the first stages. Someone who cared a little too much, pushed a little too fast.”

“And so, when ‘his’ Omega allowed someone else to court him…”

“He punished the betrayal.” The Omega’s mating glands had been ripped out. Will straightened, turning away.

“Should we have officers watching the Alpha?”

“He won’t go for the Alpha. Not this one.” Will shook his head with a bitter laugh. “This is the type of man who thinks he can’t help himself. He was ‘lured,’ the Omega ‘bewitched’ him.” All the old stereotypes, misinterpretations of the power of Omega hormones. “He won’t blame the Alpha for coveting. He blames the Omega for not staying pure for him.”

“Quite the traditionalist,” the man next to Jack finally spoke up. His accent was thick, warm, European. Will had to fight with everything he had not to breathe in at that moment. Instead he just shrugged. Nodded.

“Archaic, yeah,” Will said. “That would have been what possibly put off the Omega in the first place.”

“A scent?” Jack asked. Will’s shoulders tensed up.

“I wouldn’t know. My guess wouldn’t be a scent, though, instead it would also be instinctual. Omegas are primed to seek out protection and care, if they sense anything amiss they leave. Those still courting or looking to start would be open to approaches, but nothing can beat instinct, in the end.”

Will had had the opposite problem with his own attempts at dating; it was one of the major reasons he hadn’t attempted to date since.

“So he’s likely to kill again,” the newcomer said. Will gave him a look, a brief up-and-down before chewing the inside of his lip.

“Unfortunately, it’s very likely he will. A narcissist who thinks himself above all others does not do well with rejection. He will try to court again, and find himself similarly rebuffed, and we will find ourselves at a scene much like this one.”

“The old-fashioned ways still find themselves very popular among certain circles,” the stranger noted. “It will make the search easier. We can start with social groups.”

The wealthy, particularly those whose money was older than their name. Certain pockets of religious groups, as well. Where he’d grown up, Will couldn’t walk two feet without tripping over someone who lectured him for being out unchaperoned, though there hadn’t been a law requiring it since before Will was born.

“You must count yourself very lucky, huh Will?” Jack said, shaking his head ruefully. “No complex rituals for Betas.”

Both Jack and the stranger were Alphas, but Will’s suppressants were heavy-duty. He’d have never gotten this far otherwise. Thank god for privacy laws.

“Nope,” Will said. Not that he would have dated, even if he *had* been a true Beta. “Jack, who is this?”

“Dr. Hannibal Lecter,” the man said, holding out his hand to shake. “I’ve been asked to consult.”

Will’s eyebrow went up and he hesitated before taking the offered hand. “I’m no longer your prized bloodhound, Jack?” He quipped, pushing his hand into his pocket immediately after it was released. “I can finally use the leave I’ve been saving up.”

Jack chuckled. “Keep saving it,” he replied. “Dr. Lecter comes highly recommended by Alana Bloom. I’d been meaning to call Hannibal in to help build a profile for a while but he’d not had the time till now.”

“The fates aligned,” Hannibal pointed out, his smile hinted in the corners of his eyes and nowhere else. “And I was excited by the prospect of working with you.”

Will blinked. “With me?”

“Believe it or not, Will, you do have an exemplary record for closing cases.” Jack reminded him. Will snorted.

“As long as it’s not *my* profile you’re working on, Doctor, the team could always use fresh eyes.”

“I hardly want to step on anyone’s toes,” Hannibal offered, amused. “I will happily defer to your experience over my own.”

Will looked skeptical. “Appreciated but unnecessary. Stepping on toes and flattery may be on different sides of a spectrum but they’re equally exhausting to me.”

“As a gesture of good faith, then,” Hannibal amended, not at all knocked by Will’s response. “God forbid we become friendly in the process.”

“I don’t find you that interesting,” Will shrugged, pushing his glasses further up his nose. “Excuse me.”

“Don’t take it personally,” Jack murmured, as Will made his way over to Price to ask about sample collection. “I’m not certain Will finds anyone but the victims interesting.”

Hannibal watched him go, his head down. Avoiding eye contact, avoiding physical contact. Hannibal sucked in a slow breath through his nose.

There. Exactly as he’d thought.

Hannibal turned back to Jack. “I’m sure I can prove my worth, in good time,” he said.

“You’re welcome to try,” Jack said. “The benefit to having a Beta on the team is that there’s one less Alpha storming around trying to take charge, but Will in particular has almost no pack instincts. He doesn’t get attached. He tolerates me because he has to, but he clashes with the rest of the team. Except maybe Katz, but Katz has a fondness for sharp edges.”

“He likes a challenge?”

“She,” Jack corrected, “And sometimes I think she just likes poking to see where his boundaries are.”

“He’s very defensive, your Will. I’m sure I can get him to let down his guard a little. It’s my job, after all.”

Jack chuckled, shaking his head. “You’re welcome to try, Hannibal.”

Hannibal tried. He himself was very fond of a challenge and *especially* one so curious as Will Graham.

He’d come across his name through academic articles, and later the news, being praised and vilified in equal measure. Freddie Lounds seemed particularly fond of trying to ruffle Will’s feathers, bringing up his status as a consultant but not an agent, speculating as to why that was.

But more than Will’s genuinely exemplary track record with closing cases, Hannibal was now even more intrigued by his dynamic.

Jack Crawford and the rest of the team seemed convinced that he was a Beta, yet Hannibal had scented just a hint, just a whiff of Omega beneath the industry-grade suppressants. Will’s mannerisms and responses hinted at this being the case as well; he was demure, though he had a sharp tongue, he made himself small in the presence of more than one pack member, he avoided eye contact, he pressed his back to walls any time he could, when he was holding a conversation.

He wore scarves, or buttoned up his shirt to the very top button, even on the warmest of days, keeping his scent gland covered.

Fascinating, enigmatic thing.

The next crime scene they met at was similar to the first; an Omega massacred in their own home, scent glands chewed off, nothing taken, no weapons brought that couldn’t be found within the victim’s home.

Hannibal found Will standing just to the side of the body -- it had been found in bed, this time -- with the back of his hand covering his nose.

“Cruel and unfortunate,” Hannibal murmured, stepping up beside him. He noted with amusement that Will’s shoulders immediately tensed and he took a half-step to the side to put

distance between them.

“Unfortunate but inevitable. We knew he’d do it again.”

Will seemed reluctant to drop his hand. The smell of Omega distress lingered in the air; it would no doubt eat at him. Will’s instincts would be telling him to protect and soothe an upset pack member, but there would be no soothing the victim.

Hannibal held up the sheet of information he’d been given. “The victim is a Mr. Halloran Grey, age 21. Up until two months ago he was living with an Alpha roommate, a cousin of his.”

“Chaperone,” Will surmised. “He’ll have been from a traditionalist family, kept in the care of Alphas until he’s claimed by a mate.” Will indicated the tiny, drab dwelling around them. “This is HUD housing-- he’ll be on some sort of financial assistance. Couldn’t afford to move out on his own, couldn’t bear to be kept another moment.”

“He sought freedom, but he couldn’t break all the old habits.”

Will shook his head. “Our killer would have done all the right things. Courted him exactly the way he’d been raised to expect. Once they got a little closer, though, he’d have recognized too much in him. He wouldn’t have wanted to be trapped again.”

“And so another rejection sours our killer’s temper.”

“He’ll escalate,” Will murmured. “Soon he won’t be courting at all, he’ll be picking off any Omega that shows the slightest hesitation in his presence.”

“With escalation comes mistakes.”

“With escalation comes more bodies,” Will countered. He shrugged, shook his head again, finally lowered his hand and exhaled very deliberately through his nose. “We’ll need to comb through their connections, see if they had any mutual contact with our previous victim. Did you have any luck with the traditionalist circles?”

“Some,” Hannibal replied, inclining his head. He’d not managed to make eye contact with Will Graham once, yet. He was a master at keeping his glasses just in the way. Clever boy. “They find it abhorrent that someone from their community would do something like this.”

“Of course they do,” Will sighed. “Who wouldn’t?”

“Their beliefs aren’t extremist,” Hannibal continued softly, stepping closer to Will again. “Most believe in protection and care, rather than restriction and cloistering.”

“I wonder if they ever bother to ask their Omegas if that’s how they see it,” Will muttered.

Hannibal glanced at Will out of the corner of his eye. He was beginning to show clear signs of distress, taking on the alarm the deceased Omega had left behind. His empathy was astounding, even if it pinged at Hannibal’s own protective instincts.

“Some Omegas are, unfortunately, born into circumstances beyond their control,” Hannibal agreed. “Others choose to be there.”

“You all baffle me,” Will muttered. “I can’t imagine…” He stopped, as if to rephrase himself. “I can’t imagine choosing to keep someone like that. Someone who might not be able to turn me away because of the way I smell, my pheromones. Instincts they might hate.”

He turned, his back to the corpse. “I’ll go tell Jack what we’ve found. He may want to do a more thorough sweep of the traditionalist circles.”

As it turned out, Jack did. His methods, however, were a bit unorthodox.

“You want me to *what?* ” Will said, trying to tamp down a sudden surge of rage.

He and Hannibal sat before Jack’s desk. Jack looked thoroughly unaffected by Will’s ire.

“You’re the smallest man we have,” Jack explained. “Everyone else is too tall, too broad.”

“I’m 5’10”,” Will muttered. Well, 5’9”, but nearly 5’10”.

“Tall for an Omega, but not impossible,” Jack said. “And leaner than any of the other men on our team.”

‘Leaner’ was almost always short-hand for ‘underfed.’ Will held back a snarl.

“Besides, we can’t send an Alpha in. Trying to mask their scent will take time we don’t have, and you naturally don’t respond to or give off pheromones, as a Beta.”

“Maybe someone from another department--”

“We need an agent, Will.”

“I’m not a field agent,” Will snapped. “You’ve made that perfectly clear.”

“There is no one else,” Jack repeated, raising his voice. Will’s shoulders shoved up against his ears. Next to him, Hannibal’s hands twitched just briefly in his lap. “We need someone on the inside, someone to talk to Omegas who otherwise won’t be allowed to talk to anyone.”

“You need bait,” Will countered. “I’m fucking *bait,* Jack.”

“You’re a Beta,” Jack replied. “Smelling like an Omega for a few days won’t change your damn biology. If you happen to lure in our killer then all the better. He won’t be expecting someone to fight back, Omegas aren’t able to.”

“Jack,” Hannibal’s tone was warm, soothing. Will resisted the urge to take a deep breath but he did bring a hand to his eyes to rub them beneath his glasses, now that Jack’s lighthouse-beam of attention was directed away from him. “If I may, perhaps sending Will on his own would complicate matters. Such communities are accepting of what they call ‘stray’ Omegas,

but only if they're brought in by a trusted individual. Will coming in on his own would stir more suspicion than we can afford."

A flicker of hope flooded Will's chest. "Exactly," he said. "I'd need a chaperone. This isn't the kind of space where Omegas can just… wander around unattended."

"I'd be happy to assist by acting as Will's chaperone."

Will's hands clenched into fists at his sides. If he hadn't been under heavy suppressants, he had no doubt he'd be flooding the room with distress and *fury* .

He hadn't ever had a chaperone. His dad might have preferred it if he did, but he was too drunk and too busy to ever properly supervise Will, and after he'd died, Will had made no effort to seek out another Alpha. Now, Jack was attempting to stuff him back into a box he didn't know Will had escaped from.

"No one would believe you were a distant cousin."

"A family friend," Hannibal said smoothly. "Or a benefactor. It would be difficult to pass Will off as having been born into these circles; most Omegas have been mated by their early twenties. Best to say I've taken an interest in sponsoring him."

"Good, perfect," Jack clapped his hands together once and set them to the table again. "I'll get the lab to make you up some pheromones, an anti-scent blocker if you will. Enough for a week or two."

"A *week or two?"* Will asked, incredulous.

"As long as it takes, Will," Jack replied, his tone brooking no argument. Will, however, found he couldn't keep quiet.

"I have… plans, Jack. I've had it booked in for months now."

"Crime doesn't stop just because you want a vacation, Will. Just postpone it."

"But--"

"Postpone it, Will. what could possibly be so important?"

Will didn't answer. He sat, quiet and chastened, as Jack and Hannibal made more plans about him, around him, as though he wasn't even there. His entire life he'd been unseen and unheard, until he cloaked himself in actual invisibility. Will felt like he was reliving high school all over again. He felt sick. He felt hot. He felt dizzy.

He felt Hannibal's hand on his shoulder and jerked so hard he shoved it away.

"I didn't mean to startle you," Hannibal apologized, holding his hand aloft but away. "Jack got a call. We've been dismissed, it seems."

“You don’t have to do this,” Will said. “You’re a consultant. He’s not your boss. He doesn’t own you. He can’t just drag people into this against their will.”

“I don’t mind,” Hannibal assured him. “I’m happy to help. Besides, it means we will spend more time together. Perhaps we’ll become friendly after all.”

Will stared up at him. Hannibal didn’t know, he *couldn’t* know, just how devastating this was to Will. He was just so well-meaning and eager to help. Jack was going to take advantage of him, Will could see it already.

“Fine,” Will said stiffly. It wasn’t like he had a choice. He would just have to wrap this up quickly, before his heat began.

He could do that, right?

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> *But he remembered the pretty young men who'd gathered around to tell him all about the Alphas they had their eyes on. They'd added Hannibal to the list of 'terrifying, do not approach, how do you live with him,' but it had been with a sort of giggling awe.*
>
> *Alright. Maybe some Omegas wanted it. Half of the ones here just didn't know that they had a choice. Maybe they'd still choose this, in the end, but some of them…*
>
> The sting begins!

The plan was simple, in theory.

Infiltrate the community as an unmated and not courting pair, and Will would find out what he could by speaking with the other Omegas. Someone so traditional as their killer seemed to be would inevitably be drawn to someone like Will; an Omega who has been allowed to 'run wild', and 'uncontrolled' by the 'proper' means. Anyone approaching Will would immediately be a suspect, immediately be investigated.

Jack had promised that Will would be safe, he would be looked after. Jack had promised that no harm would come to him.

But how could he be sure? How could Jack, a mated and bonded Alpha, be sure? Will had done such a good job in tricking his boss into believing his dynamic that it wouldn't even occur to Jack to keep an eye on Will outside of investigation hours. He wouldn't think to have a guard at his home door, he wouldn't think to have someone on speed dial to get Will the hell out of there when something happened.

And something would happen.

Something would happen because Will wasn't a Beta, and he was as much a slave to his instincts as any Alpha was, and he was in so far over his head…

Will took two showers that night, because after the first he automatically drenched himself in scent blockers.

He didn't sleep.

By the time Hannibal arrived to pick him up from Wolf Trap -- he'd insisted, of course -- Will felt run ragged. And they hadn't even gone anywhere.

The moment he opened the door, Hannibal inhaled, and Will closed his eyes on a wince.

“Did you just smell me?”

Hannibal didn’t look the slightest bit ashamed, as Will settled into the car. “Difficult to avoid,” he said. “I hadn’t expected lab-grown scents to be so efficient.”

Will flushed. Alphas. They all lost their heads over Omega scents, even though Hannibal knew Will’s was meant to be artificial.

In truth, Will had checked the scent Jack had procured for him, and immediately dismissed it. There was no way something so clearly chemical would fool pedigreed Alphas who prided themselves on their ‘knowledge’ of Omegas.

“What are we suffering through today?” Will asked.

“Luncheon,” Hannibal said, “though I’m tempted to see if I can convince Jack that opera tickets are a valid expense to write off. I have a season pass, of course, but only the one.”

“Opera,” Will said dryly.

“If nothing else, I can safely say these are fond patrons of the arts.”

“Let’s just get through luncheon first. What the hell is luncheon?”

“It’s largely a garden party, with sandwiches. It’ll be easier on you, plenty of space for you to roam while still considered ‘supervised.’ You may even be able to eavesdrop.”

“Will there be coffee?” Will asked, rubbing his eyes. He’d had one already. It wasn’t nearly enough.

“It's not traditional,” Hannibal replied. He gave Will a particularly lingering look when they stopped at a traffic light. “Neither is your attire.”

“It’s the best I could do,” Will grit out. He was wearing his best pants and a shirt he’d actually bothered to iron. Hannibal was dressed like he was going to the Oscars.

“Perhaps that will be to your advantage, the first time. I’ll be sure Jack allocates an appropriate clothing budget.”

Will released a long-held breath and pushed the button to lower the window. “This isn’t Pretty Woman, Hannibal, we’re looking for a killer.”

“We are,” Hannibal agreed. “But if you are to pass, and to be accepted by those in the community already, you have to show that you’re putting in an effort to fit in. That means dressing appropriately, acting demure, respectful.”

“Not seen and not heard,” Will mumbled. Oh yes, he remembered the lessons he’d had at school once they’d all hit puberty. What it meant to be Omega, how a ‘proper’ Omega acted, where a ‘proper’ Omega went to finishing school. Will could barely remember if he was allowed to sit with his knees or ankles crossed, let alone how to ‘properly’ address an Alpha.

He'd run away from this.

"I wouldn't go so far as to muzzle you, no," Hannibal replied. Will snorted.

"Metaphorically."

When he got silence in answer, Will turned to Hannibal again. "You aren't seriously telling me these people still believe in that shit? Do they still use breeding benches? Are public punishments a thing?" Jesus, what had he signed up for? Even his own father hadn't been that insane.

"Generally speaking, muzzling is considered 'old-fashioned' even among these groups," Hannibal said. "I've seen it once, as punishment, but the gentleman who'd initiated it tends to be unpopular in these circles. It's expected that Omegas should be free to chat amongst *themselves* , if nothing else."

Will rolled his eyes. "How generous."

"Public punishments are a rarity, but you should know that it will be assumed I take you in hand in private."

Will felt a flush trail all the way down his neck and into his shirt collar. "A rarity," he repeated, mouth dry.

"Some still adhere. It's considered an out-dated fashion, though, and the gossip alone is likely to deter any Alpha who might be tempted. Even so, you won't need to witness; it's considered polite to look away."

Look away. Will wished he could look away from the entire situation.

"What's our story?" He finally asked. Hannibal was quiet as he waited to make a turn, then he cleared his throat.

"We are distantly related. Your family tried to take a different approach to raising you, and moved away from mine when you were very young. With their recent deaths, I sought you out and finding you unmated and without prospects, thought it best to bring you back to the community you belong in."

"Helps I'm already an orphan," Will replied, amused.

"The best lies are couched in truths," Hannibal agreed, tone oddly tilted. Will didn't press for more. Instead, he watched the world pass by through the open window, watched houses grow into mansions. He knew the area of course, everyone did, but he'd never had reason to be here before.

Now he had no good reason to leave.

"It is customary to arrive with a gift," Hannibal interrupted Will's thoughts gently, "would you mind if we stopped at my home for a moment so I could collect one."

“You live here?”

“I have ties to the community.”

Will snorted, shaking his head. “Of course you do.”

“My work allows me to interact with many members of many classes and backgrounds,” Hannibal replied, almost haughty.

“And it helps that you’re old money and a bit traditional yourself, doesn’t it?” Will knew Hannibal’s type. He knew the way Alphas worked. All people were different and all that jazz, but they wore those differences around a core that fell into a handful of identifiable patterns.

Hannibal was a traditionalist. He was, perhaps, not as much of one as their killer, as the people they were going to see, but it was still there. Perhaps one of those rare people who were traditionalists for their *own* relationships while allowing it in others. They usually called themselves ‘kinky,’ nowadays.

Will couldn’t imagine Hannibal ever using the word ‘kinky,’ let alone to describe himself, but he could *definitely* imagine him taking some poor Omega over his knee. This close to his heat, the flicker of irritation couldn’t drown out the faintest hint of instinctual arousal.

Hannibal sucked in another breath and shot Will a curious look. “I didn’t know artificial scents could shift so well.”

Will blanched. In the sealed car, he couldn’t get away with hiding his pheromones, with the sweetness that would be growing around him. “Jack got me the good stuff,” He said with a shrug. “I asked him not to tell me what the expenses budget looked like.”

“Probably for the best,” Hannibal replied. Will settled deeper into himself as they drove on.

When they reached Hannibal’s house, Will couldn’t help but look impressed. It was ostentatiously large.

“Would you like to come in?”

“I thought you were just picking out a gift,” Will said.

“I am, but if this is to be our base of operations, you might as well acquaint yourself with the house.”

“What?”

They hadn’t talked about this. They had talked about going undercover, they had talked about Will biting the bullet and ‘pretending’ to be Omega. They had *not* discussed Will *living with an Alpha* for that time.

“It would be suspicious if I were to bring you with me and then for you to return home somewhere far away,” Hannibal pointed out. Will shook his head.

“No.” he couldn’t share space with an Alpha, not on a good day, and *especially* not now. There was no way in hell Hannibal would buy that the pheromones were that good, manufactured. He’d find out. And if he found out, and told Jack, then--

“You would have your own space and privacy, of course, I have no desire to intrude,” Hannibal continued as though Will hadn’t spoken.

“Neither do I,” Will clutched the excuse like a life raft. “It’s your home, your space. I’ll just get a hotel room. Close enough that I’m still here, but not--”

“Will,” Hannibal gave him a gentle look, one that immediately had Will wanting to lift his chin and press himself against the door. “Come inside.”

Hannibal didn’t know, he didn’t *understand* . This close to his heat, Will couldn’t possibly surround himself in the scent of a virile Alpha.

But if he insisted, Hannibal would want to know why. And then Jack would want to know *why* . And either Will would look like he didn’t give a damn about stopping these murders, or everyone would find out.

They could *never* find out. Will was just going to have to have some goddamn self control, and catch this bastard as quickly as possible.

He followed Hannibal into the house, trying not to breathe too deeply. The car had been smaller, but Hannibal’s scent was thicker here, more embedded into the home itself. It was nearly unbearable in the kitchen, where they stopped to fetch a bottle of wine.

The kitchen smelled like safety, like home and comfort. It smelled well-loved. It smelled very nearly like a *nest* , and Will wanted to wrap himself up in the scent and roll around in it.

No. Bad Will. Focus.

“This must be confusing for you,” Hannibal’s voice cut through the haze in Will’s mind and he blinked.

“What must?”

“Taking on the mindset of an Omega.” Hannibal bent to get something from a cupboard, straightening with a bottle bag a moment later. “What you have is pure empathy, you can think like anyone and become anyone.”

“Only metaphorically,” Will tried not to bristle. Conversations like this usually led to observations regarding Will’s ‘instability’ and his ‘lack of compassionate contact’.

“You needn’t change masks with me, Will,” Hannibal said, turning to him. “You needn’t be yourself here and a helpless Omega beyond the door.”

Immersion. Full immersion in whoever Will had to become to get the job done. Perhaps it wasn’t such an awful idea. It would excuse any slip ups that might happen while Will was in

Hannibal's company with no one else around. But it was dangerous, it was a precipice Will could easily see himself toppling from.

"I appreciate that," he replied at length. "But I prefer not to carry my work home."

"Do you fear that you will remain someone else, if you don't shuck their shell quick enough?"

"Are you psychoanalyzing me, Hannibal?"

Hannibal's eyes narrowed, just a tick, and Will felt warm all over.

"Force of habit, I'm afraid, my apologies."

"We should go." Will gestured to the bottle in Hannibal's hands. "I'm sure these people don't take kindly to tardiness."

The luncheon was hosted in another house that felt too large to be lived in by a single family, with a garden to match. Several dozen people were already milling around when Hannibal and Will arrived, and Will allowed -- for the first time in more than a decade -- for his Omega mannerisms to come through in full force.

He ducked his head and lifted his shoulders. He kept his hands in his pockets and forced himself to step nearer to Hannibal, not close enough to touch, but close enough to suggest they had come together to anyone looking.

Not that that made fitting in any easier. Hannibal was popular, immediately approached by several people to be greeted and welcomed. And Will… Will looked like a gutter rat compared to the other Omegas present.

But maybe that would be useful. Already, he was drawing attention, stares. People liked an oddity. They liked a charity case even more

"Poor thing," several Alphas cooed, upon hearing Will's sob story. Poor, lonely, neglected Will.

One man went so far as to bend at the waist to catch Will's eye-- as though he was a child and not nearly as tall as him-- adding, "Unmated at your age. You must be so lonely."

Will chafed at the implication, but ducked his head in picture-perfect submission. "I have Hannibal," he said, his voice pitched a little higher, a little softer.

The Alpha sent Hannibal a knowing wink. It wasn't the implication Will had *meant* to give, but if they thought someone was already interested in him, it would only increase his appeal.

"You mustn't blame yourself," another Alpha told Will. "It's not your fault that your parents neglected to provide for you. You've got a few years of fertility left."

Will had been quiet at that, forcing himself to swallow both the bile that rose up and the anger that fuelled it. But he did look up, just over the frames of his glasses, pushed his

eyebrows together and murmured:

“I hope so, Sir.”

Once the initial onslaught passed, Hannibal guided Will farther into the garden to a place they could talk without interruption.

“Unfortunately, this is a party we cannot leave for a while yet,” he said, and he actually sounded apologetic. “You are welcome to explore as you like, the garden is intended to be perused, and there are several Omegas here who have come to make their debut, you won’t stand out in that regard.”

“Wonderful,” Will muttered, tugging his hair absently. He hated that he wanted to step closer to Hannibal, to rub himself up against his side and carry his scent around, pushing others away. He hated how *easy* it was for him to remember how to be a ‘proper’ Omega. “So is this what they do now? Have parties to shop out the stock?”

“Balls are no longer seen as practical,” Hannibal replied, smiling when Will snorted and shook his head in disbelief. “It is not uncommon for an Omega to meet their mate at a party such as this, though more conventional dating is also prevalent here. If our killer is among those who stick to more traditional routes, he will be seeking a mate here.”

“Keep an eye out,” Will murmured. “I’m probably too old to catch his attention, but if I do, he’ll come to you first. If he’s as old-fashioned as we think he is, he’ll want my chaperone’s permission to speak to me.”

Actually, he might not be too old. As Will wandered off, shoulders hunched around his ears, all Will saw was beautiful young things. The oldest unmarked Omega couldn’t have been more than twenty. They were young, naive. Easily manipulated.

But young enough to be picky. Young enough to have their choice of Alphas. Will was old enough to be desperate. Old enough to throw himself at the first Alpha that wanted him, old enough to buy into the lie that he wouldn’t get a better offer. Old enough to be reminded that he only had a scant few years left to be bred.

All of it was bullshit, and it made Will nauseous to think about. He needed to, though. He wrapped himself in the mentality, let it wash over him.

Sweet, obedient, delicate. It was a good thing shyness was a common trait among ‘well-bred’ Omegas. Will drifted among the crowds, pretending to admire the flowers as he memorized scents and faces.

A few Omegas approached him, friendly and open, but he got little information from them. Many were quick to offer pity for Will’s situation, the hope clear in their voice that they wouldn’t end up the same way. Will used that to his advantage too; asking around for those Alphas the young ones were too frightened to approach, gathering a mental list of names to run through the databases later. Strict, old, good stock, old money. No one the Omegas considered too aggressive, but then again, they would be far too polite to point something like that out.

An aggressive mate was one who could protect them, one who would keep them and their pups safe. It was an asset, not a bad character trait.

Twice, Alphas approached Will to speak with him, both times they brought up no red flags for Will. Pretentious, single-minded, self-absorbed, but nothing that would suggest pent up rage and violence. Nothing that would make an Omega instinctively back away.

When Will caught sight of Hannibal -- it wasn't often, the man comfortably moved around the party -- he felt oddly comforted. He had an ally in this, even if he, too, was as traditional and archaic as the rest of them were. Hannibal, at least, still believed Will to be a Beta, not a suitable mate for someone of Hannibal's blood and birth. At least Will wouldn't have to worry about him attempting to put in a ballot for courting him.

After several hours, Will made his way to Hannibal's side again. He was exhausted, dizzy with the mingling scents of excited Omegas and contented Alphas. He hadn't been around this many people in *years* . Hannibal welcomed Will to his side with a hum, and offered him his glass of wine.

Will downed it without tasting the contents.

"That vintage was older than you are," Hannibal pointed out softly.

"About time someone got use out of it then," Will muttered. Hannibal made a soft noise, something that sounded like chastisement, and Will gave him a look. "Did you get any worthy offers for my last few breeding years?"

"No," Hannibal replied smoothly. "No one I would deem worthy of your attention and… interest."

"I got some names from the Omegas, but without a background check they're just words on a page."

"Perhaps I'll know some," Hannibal offered, setting his empty glass to a tray as a server walked past.

"You were one," Will told him, amused. "Several pretty young things spoke about you like you were a severe schoolmaster."

Hannibal looked amused. "I've no doubt a handful of them have their fantasies, but I've never taken a ruler to any of them."

It was unexpectedly crude. Will hid a snicker in his sleeve, unable to help himself.

"You're appalling," he murmured, "the whole lot of you."

"I'm sure as a Beta, this all seems rather strange. I assure you, there are just as many Omegas fond of the old ways as Alphas. They think us unaware of the way they gossip."

The idea of an Omega *wanting* this, of *Will* wanting this, set Will's teeth on edge.

But he remembered the pretty young men who'd gathered around to tell him all about the Alphas they had their eyes on. They'd added Hannibal to the list of 'terrifying, do not approach, how do you *live* with him,' but it had been with a sort of giggling awe.

Alright. Maybe *some* Omegas wanted it. Half of the ones here just didn't know that they had a choice. Maybe they'd still choose this, in the end, but *some of them…*

And it would never be for Will. Will was never going to mate at all.

"Can I have more wine?" he asked. "I'm going to need to be a bit more tipsy if you want to send me into the fray again."

"It would be very unbecoming for you to be inebriated," Hannibal pointed out. When Will gave him another look, he shook his head. "It would reflect badly on me."

"You don't own me," Will reminded him. "Technically as a chaperone you're not responsible for my behavior, merely my person."

"True," Hannibal smiled. "But consider it a personal preference, and a personal request on my part."

Will immediately wanted to argue, but thought better of it. Hannibal was putting his reputation on the line with this community and his connections in order for Will to get a lead. He supposed he owed him sobriety. In public, anyway.

They left not long after, as the party started to dissipate, and were silent on the drive back to Hannibal's home.

Will was shown the guest bedroom -- with its own bathroom attached -- given a brief tour of the house, and in essence 'dismissed' until dinner. He used the time to call his neighbor, asking him to feed the dogs for a few days while he was on a case. He made a list of names the Omegas had provided him and sent them to Jack. He paced the room like a caged animal.

After that, Will climbed into the immaculately made bed and just stared at the ceiling.

He was several days out from his heat. He needed this case to be over so he could spend it in peace, alone in Wolf Trap. Already his instincts roared for him to stay *here,* where the house smelled comfortably of Alpha, where he would be provided for and cared for, through this heat and any other.

Will needed to get some fresh air before he suffocated on his own desires.

When he opened the door, he almost ran into Hannibal, who'd raised a hand to knock.

"Fuck. Sorry." Will rubbed his eyes beneath his glasses. His gasp of surprise had given him an unwelcome lungful of Alpha scent and he was suddenly incredibly dizzy. "I was just going to go for a walk."

"By all means," Hannibal said, stepping aside for Will to move past him. "Dinner is not yet ready, but I believe that our turn at the luncheon was more effective than we anticipated."

He held out an envelope, Will's name written in beautiful penmanship on it. Will didn't take it, he didn't want to.

"What's that?" he knew exactly what it was. He couldn't stop the excitement and panic and nausea that rose up when Hannibal told him anyway.

"I believe, dear Will, that you have an official offer of courtship."

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

> *“Certain Alphas prefer to watch potential mates interacting at social events, to see how they comport themselves, before reaching out to court them.”*
>
> *“Then I’m surprised he bothered,” Will shrugged. He’d moved about as though he was programmed to, as though there was a cloud over his head raining hail on him. And yet, that had been enough to catch Scholl’s eye, had been enough to have him reach out with an official offer of courtship.*
>
> *He saw Will not only as a failure of his dynamic, but as a chance to show his own worth as an Alpha; charitable, magnanimous, forgiving, stern. A provider and protector of the highest order.*
>
> Who's courting our boy?

The letter was from a man called Peter Scholl. In it, he professed Will’s beauty, expressed his sympathy for his situation.

He worded his barbs so carefully, but Will was not a sheltered child raised to be a house Omega. He knew a backhanded compliment when he saw it. He knew, when Peter reassured him that he should not fear that his age made him any less appealing, that he was reminding Will that it would indeed be unappealing to many. When Peter expressed shock that Will had gone so long uncourted, it was only to remind Will of the narrowing window of his fertility.

It was a carefully worded letter, and it could have come from any Alpha who, for whatever reason, had been unlucky with the younger, fresh-faced Omegas.

But Peter had been on the list, and not with the same student-crush air that the Omegas had applied to Hannibal. Peter had brought frowns to their faces, nervous little titters,

Once , a boy had whispered secretively, *he **demanded** public punishment for a slight against him. He wouldn’t let it go until poor Aaron got a thorough spanking* .

Not enough to accuse a man of murder, but enough to make a red flag go up in Will’s mind.

He and Hannibal had the letter between them over dinner, discussing possible approaches. Will wanted to remain aloof. Hannibal insisted he reply as soon as possible.

“It’s incredibly rude to keep a suitor waiting,” he explained. “And if this is our killer, it’s also unwise to.”

“I need to lure him,” Will reminded Hannibal as he stabbed into his -- unfairly delicious -- dinner. “I don’t actually want to be courted by him. Wouldn’t a slight bring him closer?”

“Or he could lose interest,” Hannibal insisted. “Respond quickly to make sure he does not.”

In the end, Will relented and penned a letter back. It amused as much as it sickened him that his response was expected to be hand written as the invitation had been. Peter Scholl was looking more and more likely as a suspect; even at the luncheon Will had met very few Alphas who stuck to traditions so strongly.

And he hadn’t met Peter Scholl.

“That doesn’t mean he wasn’t present,” Hannibal pointed out. “Certain Alphas prefer to watch potential mates interacting at social events, to see how they comport themselves, before reaching out to court them.”

“Then I’m surprised he bothered,” Will shrugged. He’d moved about as though he was programmed to, as though there was a cloud over his head raining hail on him. And yet, that had been enough to catch Scholl’s eye, had been enough to have him reach out with an official offer of courtship.

He saw Will not only as a failure of his dynamic, but as a chance to show his own worth as an Alpha; charitable, magnanimous, forgiving, stern. A provider and protector of the highest order.

To Will’s surprise, Hannibal would be the one to deliver the letter. He didn’t ask for details, the more information he got on the traditions and expectations of Omegas in this community the more his head hurt. He wanted *out.*

He thanked Hannibal for dinner, thanked him for the clothes he had provided for Will to sleep in -- knowing he would be staying the night, the bastard -- and waited for Hannibal to leave the house and pull out of the driveway before climbing the stairs.

He needed to explore.

Well, he didn’t *need* it. He was a man in control of his instincts. He didn’t submit to outdated Omega whims.

But it would make him feel better to know all the entrances to the house, to see for himself the layout. That Hannibal’s scent only increased as he walked down the hall was in no way a contributing factor.

Will’s heat, brought down from four times a year to two by his birth control-- and thank god for HIPAA laws keeping his medical records private-- was still a week away. Even so, he could feel it creeping up his spine, preheat aches settling in early. With the reduced rate of his heats came an almost unbearable strength to them, and a craving for safety.

Hannibal’s room *reeked* of him, intense and overwhelming. Will took a hesitant step inside, then another.

He just wanted to know. To see. To understand.

Who was Will kidding? He was an Omega on the cusp of heat who hadn't had an Alpha since his college years, and then only the one, disappointing time. He craved closeness. He craved comfort.

Will found himself standing in Hannibal's closet, not entirely sure how he got there, rubbing the sleeve of one of Hannibal's suits against his cheek.

The texture of the fabric, the design, the very fact that this was *Hannibal's* clothing would have been enough, but it smelled of him, that scent of power and poise lingering like perfume. Will didn't realize he was purring until he'd stepped deeper into the closet, burying his face against the jacket's lapels, chasing the scent where it was stronger.

He just needed to do this, just once, to get it out of his system. Just enough to inoculate himself against Hannibal's smell so he could keep a clear head on his shoulders.

But the longer he stayed, the more desperate his need grew for more. From Hannibal's suits he moved to his shirts, whimpering helplessly when he found those among the recently cleaned that almost felt warm with Hannibal's scent.

Will was better than this. He was stronger than this. And yet he was shaking with the effort it took not to pull down Hannibal's clothes and bury himself in them, building himself a nest right there in the Alpha's bedroom.

Will jerked back and closed the closet doors, leaning his forehead against them as he tried to catch his breath and bring himself back to the now. He needed to get it together. If for no other reason than to keep Hannibal believing he was only masquerading as an Omega. If he found out, it would be the end of Will's career. Hell, it could be the end of Will's entire professional life. His work would be discredited, he'd never find a job again. He would be reduced to the thing he had been fighting against his entire life.

No.

Don't think about it.

Will moved towards Hannibal's bed instead. He had no intention of resting on it, of even touching it, but even just looking had Will's mind in a tailspin, imagining how he could make himself a place in it, how Hannibal would cover him with his entire body to keep him safe when they nested *together*--

Outside, someone's car alarm went off, and Will cursed, rubbing his hands over his face hard enough to hurt. He turned to leave and hesitated, his eye catching something he hadn't noticed before.

Hannibal's tie, the one he'd been wearing all day, was hanging over the back of a chair, the only thing out of place in his immaculate bedroom. It felt like a lure in itself, but Will was too wired to take that into account. Besides, it didn't matter. A tie was a tie was a tie, Hannibal

had hundreds of them. If he found it the next day, replaced where Will now took it from, he could think himself absentminded.

Will snatched the tie, dipping back into the closet only long enough to leave a clean one in its wake. It was physically painful to drag himself from the closet a second time, but this time he fled, darting down the hall to sequester himself in his room.

There, he pressed the tie to his face, inhaling the thick scent of *Alpha* in a safe environment. Hannibal had promised him privacy. He would not catch him here. Will could give in to his instincts as much as he liked.

And give in, he did. Will pulled all the spare bedding from the closet. He would worry about how to wash it without Hannibal's notice later. He piled everything into a great nest, bigger and better than anything he might have at home. The bed was not against the wall, as he would have preferred (and as it was in Hannibal's room, incidentally), but he managed to get the outside edges of the nest big enough that it *almost* didn't bother him.

The tie, Will tucked into his pillow, so that all he could smell as he curled up in bed was Hannibal, all he could think about was Hannibal. Alpha scent, thick and powerful and *strong*. If Will was another Omega, *any* other Omega, Hannibal would be one hell of a catch. He would sire intelligent and beautiful pups, and Will knew he would feel Hannibal inside him forever if he gave him the chance.

But Hannibal thought him a Beta, as did the rest of the world. It was better that way. Will would need to get back to Wolf Trap for his heat, but until then, he could steal Hannibal's scent. It was almost like having an Alpha.

By the time Hannibal returned home, he had his own theories in regards to one Peter Scholl. He knew of the man, but rarely interacted with him by choice. Certainly, he had the high tastes that Hannibal did, but he also held people to different standards -- in that he didn't see them as people at all. He had a particularly solipsistic view of the world that was a little too hard even for Hannibal to swallow.

Their brief interaction had shown Hannibal clearly how capable he was as a killer, and how likely he was to be *their* killer. He'd received Hannibal with thinly veiled disdain, and read Will's letter out loud in front of him. Hannibal's place as Will's chaperone meant little to him.

Hannibal left with new knowledge and firmer standing plans of his own.

The house was silent when he locked the door behind himself; Will had told him he would have an early night, and Hannibal had taken the long way home to allow him to settle comfortably.

He didn't want to be interrupted either.

He'd guessed at Will's dynamic the first day they'd met, scenting him through blockers, seeing the glint of gold just hidden behind colored contact lenses, but now, now that Will had stopped wearing the blockers, his true scent permeated Hannibal's house like incense; dizzying and warm.

He was close to his heat. He was perfectly primed for a killer.

Just not… their killer.

Hannibal followed Will's scent up the stairs. He'd known when he left where Will's instincts would lead him. Years of wearing the industrial-strength blockers had made Will complacent; he'd forgotten that without them, he'd leave his scent everywhere.

Hannibal's closet was flooded with the scent of needy Omega. Some of his suits smelled as though they'd been rubbed directly against Will's scent glands as he marked his territory. Like it or not, Will had instinctively claimed Hannibal as his own, leaving his scent behind to ward off other Omegas.

As if there could ever be any other Omega.

No Omega had ever piqued Hannibal's curiosity like Will. None Hannibal had met could stomach violence, nor could they look at it and lay out the killer's motivations, clear as day. Will's intelligence was unmatched.

He would make wonderful pups, unmatched by any others, but more than that, he would never become dull, never cease to be fascinating.

Hannibal's tie had been replaced. The one left in its place had the same color, the same pattern, but the fabric was entirely different. Will would not have had any way to know just how good Hannibal's memory was. Nor could he know that Hannibal had left his clothes out on purpose. A gift for the nest Will had no doubt built in his guest room.

Tomorrow, Will would meet with and be courted by a killer. But he would be guarded by another one, and as soon as Hannibal could prove that Peter Scholl was the Omega Murderer, and thus free Will from his assignment, Peter Scholl would breathe his very last.

Call it a courting gift.

Will hadn't been surprised that in the morning he had been presented with a full three-piece suit by Hannibal. He had been surprised that it was tailored.

"Jack approved the budget," was all Hannibal said when Will looked askance. "I would offer you breakfast, but I feel the purpose of this meeting would be to feed you as well." He handed Will coffee, instead.

Coffee was good.

As Hannibal drove him to where he would meet Peter Scholl, he briefed Will on what exactly 'dating' meant in this community.

"The implication is that once a pair is courting, they will bond during the first shared heat together." Hannibal was saying. "Meetings before then are allowed and encouraged, but in public only, so the Apha does nothing untoward. My being your assigned chaperone no longer matters or holds weight here, I'm afraid."

“So you’re leaving me in the lion’s den alone?” Will asked, tilting a look out the corner of his eye. Hannibal smiled.

“Hardly. I would not leave you so, Will. I will be there should you need me.”

Should Scholl do something ‘untoward’, Will thought. This would be Alpha posturing, should it come to that. He hoped it wouldn’t.

“Could we swing by my house after, please? I need to pick some things up if I’m to be staying with you.”

“I could get them for you,” Hannibal offered. “Jack most likely already called you about coming to see him after your… meeting.”

“You don’t know what I need,” Will pointed out. Plus, he didn’t want Hannibal anywhere near his house before his heat; he would lose his mind if he could smell him there.

“A change of clothes, toiletries, your gun, I would expect.”

Will snorted. “That’s about it, yeah.”

“Your hormones,” Hannibal added, almost as an afterthought.

Will almost said yes. He had, indeed, left the bottles behind, only one seal cracked so he could test the scent, more out of curiosity than anything else.

But he remembered, nearly too late, just what he must smell like.

“Y- no. No, I had the bottles in my pocket. In case the first dose wore off,” he added, when Hannibal looked askance at him. “I wasn’t sure how long one application would last. I know my natural scent is very faint.”

“Almost nonexistent,” Hannibal agreed. “I have a stronger nose than most. Most Alphas can’t smell Betas. I have better chances, and even to me, your scent is particularly deadened.

Will turned to hide his flush. “It’s genetic,” he said stiffly. “We all have really weak scents, in my family.”

It didn’t take much longer to arrive at the restaurant Scholl had picked. Hannibal eyed it with distaste.

“He could have done better, for a first courting meeting.”

Will shrugged. “I’m nothing special. I’m too old, nearly forty. I have slim chances of mating ‘up,’ as it were. He knows he doesn’t have to waste much money on me.”

Peter Scholl was tall like an Alpha, and broad like an Alpha, but he had a pinched, nervous quality to him that immediately set Will on edge. He was waiting for Will at a table in the corner, one with only two seats, and he gave Hannibal a polite nod when he saw them.

“Much obliged,” he said, addressing Hannibal even as he didn’t look at him. “I’m more than happy to return him home when we’re finished.” The implication was clear that Hannibal was to go.

“Sir,” Will hated how the word sat in his mouth. “I would… appreciate it if my chaperone could come to get me. I’m still so unfamiliar with custom, I would hate for something to happen.”

Both saw it, the immediate tension in the man’s jaw, the way he took a deep breath to widen his chest. He was used to Omegas speaking only when spoken to, and even then quietly and monosyllabically. Already, Will had overstepped. Had Will been truly interested in the courtship, the prospects would have already looked bleak.

“Very well, there’s no harm in him retrieving you after our first time together. I would expect you, however, to not have so much reliance on him in future.”

Will shook his head, doing his best to appear meek and subdued. He could see Hannibal out of the corner of his eye, his body stiff in displeasure but too well schooled in etiquette to get into an argument so publicly. After a moment he ducked his head and turned to Will.

“I will return in an hour, which should be plenty for a customary first meeting. Mr. Scholl.”

“Dr. Lecter.”

Hannibal left. Will immediately felt unmoored. Peter Scholl gave off the impression of not actually existing as a person, but as a void. He was cold as he regarded Will, cold when he ordered drinks for both of them, cold when they were brought.

Will didn’t speak first as much because he genuinely didn’t want to as because he knew the Alpha would probably slap him if he tried.

And *he* was self-aware enough to understand he didn’t even want to be mated, if young Omegas brought up to think their entire life’s purpose was to be bred and owned felt uneasy, it was surprising other Alpha’s hadn’t clued in.

“You understand this is an unusual situation,” Scholl said finally. “Your age and your standing, not to mention your bearing, makes you rather uncouth in my circles.”

Will was unappealing. Will was untamed. Will was old. Will would only bear a small handful of pups before his fertile years were over. Everything Scholl said was exactly what Will had expected him to say, and he carefully schooled his features into devastation, rather than ire.

“I’m sorry, Sir,” Will whispered. He left it at that. He could make promises to learn, could suggest that Hannibal was instructing him in his etiquette, but the best thing to do would be to let Scholl talk about himself.

“It’s not your fault,” Scholl assured him, though it was clear he didn’t entirely believe it. “You were neglected by those who should have sought what was best for you. Your options have been severely limited by circumstance, but I’m still willing to give you a chance.”

A waiter interrupted them. Scholl ordered for Will, egg whites and fruits, something to keep him thin and hungry, something to keep him obedient in the hopes of earning a treat. Will held his tongue.

“You’re a lovely man, Will,” Scholl said, his voice pitched to soothe. Instead, it grated at Will like sandpaper. “If you are willing to be guided, trained to act like a *proper* Omega, I could be convinced to give you a chance.”

“Please, Sir?” Will whispered, head tilted, exposing his scent gland to the world. Scholl’s pupil’s dilated.

“Such a pretty thing,” he praised. “Tell me about yourself.”

Scholl, Will knew, did not want to know about Will’s accomplishments, his aspirations, his career. He wanted information he could use against him, he wanted to know just how much he could turn into a knife to stab at Will, until he was weak and desperate for praise.

Will fed him the story he and Hannibal had arranged. He made note of his lonely life as an only child, laid out hints that he’d always wanted a large litter, that his lack of children was devastating for him. He made it believable that he might be willing to do just about anything for someone to care for him and give him pups.

He handed himself to Scholl on a platter, watching as moment by moment the Alpha grew more eager to claim Will for his own. A conquest, a notch in his bedpost. Will would never be an Omega to show off for his stock, but he would be made useful.

By the time the hour was up, Scholl had made plans for the day after next to see Will again, and Will decided to turn his disadvantage in his favor.

“I’m sorry, Sir, I’m--” Will took a breath and released it, aiming for helpless. “My heat is soon--”

“Yes, you reek of it,” Scholl replied, tilting his head. “Shameless, really, to allow yourself to leave the house smelling so provocative.”

“I'm sorry, Sir, I thought the blockers I bought would be enough. But… with it so near, would you consider helping me through?” Will felt sick with how needy he sounded. The whine came unbidden from his throat but worked well for the tone he needed. Just a minute, a moment more of this… “I will learn, I’ll bring nothing but honor to you if you claim me as your own.”

It was tempting, he knew it was, and risky. Luring Scholl in with the promise of a consummated heat was guaranteed to work, but Will’s senses would be dulled by instinct, he would need a team on standby to step in and take over.

And for that he needed to admit what was happening, to show himself as who he really was to Jack Crawford and the FBI.

And he couldn’t have *that,* either.

He had to pin Scholl before that, had to be able to prove what was so very clear to him now. And for that, he needed to make Scholl want to see him again. And again.

Scholl was their killer. There was no doubt about that in Will's mind. Scholl was hungry when he looked at him. He wanted Will, truly. He wanted to fuck him, to breed him. But the second Will betrayed him, the second he failed to be as picture perfect as Scholl wanted, he would kill him. Not only would he feel no regret, he'd be happy about it. Scholl hungered for blood as much as he hungered for slick.

Will was lucky his history was not well known. Had Scholl known he was not a virgin, he might already be dead.

"You're so desperate," Scholl said. There was derision in his tone. Will affected a flinch. "But it's alright, sweetheart. I understand. You won't have to be lonely again, I promise you. If you're very good, if you do everything I say and don't give me any reason to discipline you, then you'll have everything an Omega should need. You want pups, don't you? Pups and treats and a safe home to nest in?"

Will whined. He didn't want any of that with *Scholl* , but it took very little to call on the ache of his upcoming heat and flood his vocal cords with it. "Please," he begged. "Please, Sir, I'll be so very good for you."

"I'll have you," Scholl promised. "We'll meet the next few days, and if you are a very, *very* good boy, you'll earn your reward."

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

At Wolf Trap w/ Scholl. Tell Jack. Send team to cut off escape via roads, possible K9 for forest pursuit. Hope won't be necessary.

Some dub-con here you guys, between Will/OC.

After his meeting with Scholl, Will got a ride with Hannibal back to Quantico so he could see Jack.

Peter Scholl hadn't come up with any criminal record, he didn't even have parking tickets, but there had been several complaints filed against him by service staff as well as employees of his company.

None had ever gone to court.

Most had been withdrawn.

Two of the complainants had mysteriously disappeared.

"It's amazing what the lab guys can do these days," Jack added as Will made to leave his office. "The manufactured scents are so authentic, I'd have mistaken you for an actual Omega if I didn't know any better."

Will hoped he never knew better.

He caught a cab back to Wolf Trap to get his things. He grabbed the bottles to have with him should Hannibal ask about them again and emptied one into the sink to show he'd used it.

He considered driving back to Hannibal's home, but decided against it. The last thing he needed was to blow his cover by doing something so un-Omegan as driving his own vehicle.

That night after dinner, as Hannibal sequestered himself in his study to work, Will returned his tie.

It already smelled more of him than of Hannibal. Will's scent would only get stronger as his heat approached, and the entire guest room was flooded with it. The satisfied sleep Will had had the night before had been solely thanks to the thick scent that flooded the tie, and it would no longer satisfy that Omegan urge.

Will had a bottle of melatonin at hand and was completely willing to lie awake all night, if it meant not succumbing to his instincts again, but…

The lid to the laundry hamper hadn’t been replaced properly.

As Will passed, all he could smell was Hannibal, thick and overwhelming. He wanted to dump the hamper over and roll around in it.

God, he was desperate. Will was disgusted with himself. But as he passed, he saw a white button-down shirt.

Hannibal must have owned a dozen plain white button-down shirts. Will hesitated. Just a foot from the doorway, a foot from freedom, a foot from *sense* .

Will snatched the shirt from the basket, replacing it with one of the clean ones from the closet. Hannibal would never know the difference. How could he possibly miss one of a dozen identical shirts?

And the scent would be stronger, would last longer. Will buried his face in the collar, right where the fabric would brush against one of Hannibal’s scent glands, and breathed deep.

He slept like the dead.

The next day Hannibal insisted on taking Will out with him as he ran errands.

"You've been introduced into the community, now you have to show yourself in it."

"Why is everyone so goddamn social," Will muttered. Hannibal had handed him another suit to wear that morning and Will felt at once overdressed and unfairly pampered. It didn't help that Hannibal was so close to him and smelled *so good.*

"Because for many Omegas here this is the only time they can see their friends."

"And you're still insisting that this isn't legal bondage?" Will asked him. "People who can't even leave their homes without permission to see other human beings?"

"For some, the safety of their situation is enough," Hannibal countered. "You should speak to some of the mated Omegas next time, ask them how they feel with their choices."

"As if they'd be honest."

"Have you never wanted quiet? Peace?" Hannibal asked him as they stopped at a far too fancy eatery for lunch. "You live by the woods, out far, far away from city sounds and lights."

"Yes, but that is on my terms," Will replied. "I answer to no one but myself."

"Is it ever lonely?" Hannibal asked, and the way he asked didn't imply -- for a change -- that Will's lifestyle was unbecoming. "Even Betas are known to find mates, or packs to call their own."

“I have my dogs,” Will said. It wasn’t the entire truth. His dogs *were* wonderful, and Will *was* an introvert.

But it got lonely, sometimes. Just a little. Just enough to hurt.

Especially during his heats, rocking and twisting and *aching* for an Alpha to pin him down and knot him.

But it was worth it. For every moment Will made his own choices, every day he went in to work, it was worth it.

Hannibal had quite a few errands to run, all of them in areas of the city that Will had never stepped foot in. He trailed Hannibal through market stalls, head bowed, ears open.

There were a lot more familiar faces than he had been expecting. Baltimore was a city; there were plenty of people passing by.

Yet Will found himself getting nods from Alphas and excited waves from Omegas. Hannibal stepped closer after the latter, bending to murmur in his ear. “Would you like to go socialize? It would be good for appearances.”

"I really, really don't,"

"That wasn't a question," Hannibal set a hand warm, far too warm, to the base of Will's spine and gently pushed him forward. "Talk to them."

Will gritted his teeth and tried to resist, but Hannibal smelled wonderful, and he was *touching* him, and his voice was so beautifully *commanding* …

"I've not seen you around before, hi!" One of the Omegas was damn near bouncing on the balls of his feet when Will stepped nearer. "I'm Quinn."

"Uh Will," Will replied softly. Acting shy wasn't difficult when he didn't want to interact with anyone. And Quinn was just so… *bouncy.*

"Hi, Will! Is that your mate?"

"No, just my uh, chaperone."

"Quinn," an Alpha set his hand to Quinn's shoulder and squeezed gently. "Be nice. Will's come a long way and had a bit of a rough start."

Will hated the immediate pity that flared in Quinn's eyes, and the eyes of the few other Omegas who clustered around nearby, not quite as confident as Quinn to come closer yet.

"I'm sure you'll be mated soon," Quinn offered gently. "I didn't find my Alpha until I was a little older either."

Will couldn't help but smile, giving Quinn a look over the frames of his glasses. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-four."

Will laughed, unable to keep the sound back, and was glad when Quinn smiled back, and didn't look offended.

"I was really rebellious when I was small," Quinn continued, "I needed someone to get me in hand before I was ready to be a good mate."

"Don't sell yourself so short," Quinn's Alpha chuckled, stroking Quinn's hair before leaving him alone to chat. Will watched him go, watched the way Quinn smiled, like the Alpha was his entire universe.

"Are you happy?" Will found himself asking.

Quinn's brow furrowed. He seemed unable to tear his eyes away from his Alpha's back for a moment, and when he looked at Will, he had pity in his eyes.

"You shouldn't feel bad about being unmated," Quinn said softly. "It'll happen. You're pretty, and you smell good. It's not your fault if things were hard for a while."

It felt bizarre to have an Omega in Quinn's position trying to comfort *him* , but Will gave a tentative little nod anyway.

"I *am* happy," Quinn said. "Deliriously so. Kyle gives me the structure I need, and he's not too awful if I'm feeling mischievous. I think I finally talked him into photography lessons," he added with a wink.

Any Omega craved structure. Even Will. It was natural to want to be able to predict his life, to know what was coming, to know what would happen. But the idea of letting someone *else* decide the structure…

It would be heaven , Will's pre-heat-addled brain whispered. He shoved that thought down. It wasn't *him* , it was just biology.

"Someone asked to court me," He said with a shrug. "Maybe it will be like that."

Quinn waggled his eyebrows. "See, I told you. Good for you, it'll give you a break from the terrifying Dr. Lecter."

"Is he really so scary?" Will asked, and watched the way Quinn flushed. Clearly another young one with fantasies. "I've already met with Mr. Scholl once, I really want to leave a good impression when we meet next time."

Something in Quinn's expression shifted, he went pale. He went less than pale, he looked ill.

When he stepped closer and grasped Will by the hand Will didn't have time to move away.

"Will," he whispered. "Will, I can only imagine how hard it is to be where you are, but I… I would not let him court you."

Will was genuinely surprised for the first time since being shoved so unwillingly into his actual dynamic again.

"I won't get a better offer--"

"You will," Quinn swallowed. "You will, you absolutely will. Perhaps Dr. Lecter will court you. He already looks like dotes on you and is very kind."

"You said he was terrifying--"

"Will, please reconsider," Quinn's eyes were so wide, so bright, that Will felt himself start to whine softly to comfort him. Quinn's laugh was shaky. "I'm sorry. I'm really sorry, that was out of line. I wish you the best Will, I really do."

"Thank you." It sounded like a question coming out of Will's mouth. Quinn squeezed his hands.

"I'd like to see you again, when you're free. Your Alpha can call Kyle, he lets me to go out on my own sometimes if it's with a trusted friend."

Before Will could say anything else, ask anything else, Quinn was trotting back to his friends, giving Will a gentle wave over his shoulder.

There was something there, something Quinn knew, but wasn't telling. Perhaps something he'd been instructed not to talk about.

And this was a man who loved his life. This was a man who *wanted* to be owned by his partner, who talked about structure and discipline as if it was a treat. This man, who had looked as if the world was ending when Will said Scholl's name.

"Did you have a good time?" Hannibal murmured when Will rejoined him.

"He wants to check on me," Will whispered back. "He looked terrified when I said Scholl was courting me. Then he offered to spend time with me, just the two of us. I think he wants to talk me out of it."

Hannibal hummed softly. "He may have seen something. Something that worried him. It may not have been actionable, or perhaps he feared he wouldn't be believed."

"I'd believe him," Will muttered. Hannibal gave him a small smile, turning him gently towards the car.

"I'll speak with his Alpha. We'll arrange something, though it probably won't be before you next see Scholl."

Will's next date with the Alpha was strained and exhausting. Scholl spent the entire time berating Will, making him agree with how disadvantaged he was, how Scholl was his savior, how without him Will would die alone and unmated and unloved.

Will attempted to ask if he would be able to study, and found just the look the man gave him was enough to cow a weaker Omega.

"I see no reason why you'd need something like that, when I'll give you everything you need."

"Of course, Sir, I'm sorry."

"You'll learn," Scholl shrugged, the implication clear that should Will *not* he would not like the outcome.

Will was returned to Hannibal's home wilted. He took the glass of wine gratefully.

"I'm so glad I'm not interested in courtship," Will mumbled. "It's so draining."

"Any courtship?" Hannibal asked, amused.

"Any," Will confirmed, to Hannibal's delight.

“Have you had a lover before?”

Will flushed. “A few Betas,” he murmured, downing the rest of his wine glass. “Nothing recent. I don’t have the time *or* the inclination."

He felt uncomfortably warm. Hannibal had lit a fire in the study, but this warmth felt like it came from *inside* Will. He found himself thinking longingly of the shirt hidden amongst his bedding upstairs.

Heat was coming on faster than Will had expected. At this rate, he had mere days instead of another week and a half. He blamed Hannibal. Will should have known he couldn’t smell sexy, available Alpha for days at a time and *not* speed up his heat symptoms.

“Did you make me a playdate,” he asked, offering up his glass to be refilled.

“I called Quinn’s Alpha,” Hannibal said. “I suggested Quinn might be a good influence on you, and he suggested you take a trip to the park together tomorrow. They have a dog.”

"Oh thank fuck," Will laughed, thanking Hannibal when he refilled his glass. "It's almost like you're actually my chaperone."

"An amusing daydream, is it not?" Hannibal replied. Will snorted.

"I feel like I'm the dog," Will replied.

The next day, Will met Quinn in the park. His dog was a sweet little whippet named Arrow that immediately went to greet Will and wagged his tail. Quinn looked happy to see him too, giving Will a very enthusiastic hug.

Once they started walking, Quinn grew a bit more subdued.

"I'm sorry if I scared you yesterday," he admitted. "It was wrong of me,"

"It's okay," Will told him. "It means a lot you worried so much without even knowing me."

Quinn smiled a little, looking up at Will. "We're all in this together, right. We look out for our own."

Our own.

Will swallowed. "I'll admit, Mr. Scholl is intimidating. But I know I need to do better to fit in."

"He's different," Quinn murmured. "Will, he's courted so many Omegas, he has standards that even the most well bred of us can't seem to live up to. He frightens me. His eyes look dead when he looks at you, like you don't exist."

Will didn't say that all Alpha's seemed to look at him like that, when he was presenting as Omega. He wasn't sure it would make sense to Quinn, who was so self-assured and happy.

For one burning, aching moment, Will would have given *anything* to be as happy as Quinn was. He almost resented his independence.

That thought was largely heat, though, and easily dismissed. Will could admit to himself that he wanted to be coddled, taken care of, *maybe* even spanked once or twice if he was *very* close to his heat. But he didn't want to be *owned* , and you couldn't have one without the other.

"My heat is coming up," Will admitted. "I feel like there's a lot of pressure to rush."

"I know," Quinn said, "I can smell it on you. I bet all the Omegas can. Alpha's take an extra day or two for the scent to build up."

Will flushed.

"But Will," Quinn continued urgently, "Will, Kyle will make us leave a luncheon if Scholl shows up. He hates him. And I used to have this friend… His name was Gavin, and he was a little bit…" Quinn flushed, embarassed. "Look, I'm not stupid. I know what life can be like for Omegas nowadays, I know we have more options. But I like where I'm at. Gavin wanted both, he wanted an education and a career *and* an Alpha who'd whip him into shape."

Will winced. He could sympathize, even if he couldn't entirely understand. "And he couldn't find an Alpha who would let him have both."

"No, he *could have* ," Quinn insisted. "We're a small social group, but we're connected to other groups in other areas. Everyone knows someone. Kyle was willing to make some calls, and Erik has club connections. But then Scholl came, and he… He made Gavin feel like *shit* ."

The curse was nearly whispered. Quinn looked as though he couldn't believe he'd said it, but it didn't stop him from continuing. "Gavin told me no one else was going to want him. He was too wild. And I know, I *know* that was Scholl whispering in his ear, even if he didn't say it. But Gavin moved away before I could convince him."

"That's good, isn't it?" Will asked. "If it got him away from Scholl?"

“Yeah,” Quinn mumbled. He stared down at his shoes, his expression haunted.

Will stopped walking, Quinn stopping at his side. Arrow bounced along a few paces before seeing his master wasn’t following and trotted back.

“I’m sorry,” Will said. Quinn looked up at him, lips parted in surprise.

“What for?”

“I wasn’t brought up like this,” Will said, a half-truth. “I can’t understand how someone would want this, even though you’re happy. Even though I know others who are, as well. I just… I can’t see myself being happy as someone’s mate… and nothing more.”

“If it’s the right mate, you are more,” Quinn told him softly. “The right mate, for *you,* Will, will let you do the things you want to do. Peter Scholl won’t. He won’t let you do anything. He’ll smother you.” Quinn tilted his head. “He’s already started to, hasn’t he?”

Will laughed, a breathless and humorless thing, ducking his head.

“You’re allowed to say no, Will,” Quinn whispered. “I know we might seem old-fashioned, if you come from a world where Omegas can make their own way, but this isn’t prison. You can say no to him. You have to.”

“I’m scared of what he’ll do if I try,” Will admitted.

The rest of their walk was quiet, but not uncomfortable. Quinn asked Will about life as an unmated Omega at his age, without judgement, with wide eyes like a child. Will asked about Quinn’s life with his mate, finding that his own heart was yearning for such a connection more and more.

They parted when Quinn’s Alpha arrived to collect him, offering to drop Will home as well. Will declined, knowing Hannibal was going to be there soon to take him back. By the time he arrived, Will was trembling, skin hot as if from fever. He knew what that meant. He hated what it meant.

He’d have to get in touch with Scholl himself, to lure him out, to find a way to overpower him before he could call the team in.

He declined dinner, citing a headache. He didn’t notice that the shirt he’d smuggled to his nest had been replaced with another.

Will slept soundly, but woke early. He felt like he was seeing the world through a haze of fog.

Tonight. Today. In the next hour or two, if he was unlucky.

He was always unlucky.

“It’s improper for you to be calling an Alpha yourself,” Scholl lectured when Will called him from his car.

“My heat,” Will blurted out. “It’s coming, today. Will you still have me?”

Scholl took a moment to answer, but he sounded pleased. “I hadn’t decided,” he said. “You have to understand, Will, you would be a very serious undertaking. You’re undisciplined.”

“I’d learn,” Will begged, purposefully letting a tinge of fear color his voice. “Please, Sir, I would be so good for you. Please don’t leave me alone. It’ll hurt.”

“Where is your nest?” Scholl asked. “I won’t abide Lecter’s stench ruining our mating.”

“I have a place,” Will told him, rattling off his home address. “Hannibal rented it for me, so that I could have a safe space for my heat if no one would have me.”

“Be naked and kneeling when I get there,” Scholl commanded. “And *wet* .”

The dogs were at the nearest neighbor’s farm. At Wolf Trap, Will had his gun and his cuffs from when he’d worked homicide. And if Scholl overpowered him and fled, there would be nowhere for him to run. In the city, he could disappear into the crowd. In Wolf Trap, they could isolate the roads.

And Will would have a safe place to lock himself up after, and suffer out his heat.

Jack was going to find out. There was no escaping that now. But if Will could deliver him the Omega Killer on a silver platter, he might be able to avoid being fired outright.

Maybe.

He messaged his boss by proxy; he wrote to Hannibal.

At Wolf Trap w/ Scholl. Tell Jack. Send team to cut off escape via roads, possible K9 for forest pursuit. Hope won’t be necessary.

There were a few minutes more before Will would be too desperate to think clearly, and several after before Scholl showed up to claim him.

Will got his rifle from the safe, a few knives from the kitchen that he hid around the living room, between the couch cushions, under a pillow on his bed. He undressed, cursing that he *was* actually slick, and knelt trembling on the rug by the front door. Beneath himself were his cuffs, undone, and a slim weapon he’d carried since self defense classes at the academy, enough to hurt but not kill with.

It was something. *Something.*

Will could feel the clock ticking through his very bones. Time made no sense for a while.

Then a car door slammed. Footsteps heavy on the porch. The creak of the screen door being opened, the front door after that.

The Alpha smelled wrong. He wasn't *Will's.* He wasn't welcome here. But he was coming closer, snaring Will by the chin, by the hair, tugging him close, closer to where he smelled *foul* of hormones and need. Will bared his teeth.

"Be good," the Alpha said. Will whined.

"Peter Scholl," he gritted out. "You are under arrest for the suspected murder of--" he didn't finish, white sparked behind Will's eyes as he was slapped, hard, upside the head. Then hit again.

"Lying little *bitch,* " Will heard, barely audible over the ringing in his ears. He reached beneath him for the cuffs, for his weapon--

He'd cut it too close. Waited too long. Scholl growled, and Will's entire body went stiff against his will.

Alpha is angry. Have to placate, have to be good .

"You think I didn't keep an eye on how much the feds knew?" Scholl growled, hauling Will up by his hair. "You think I didn't see you skulking around?"

Fuck fuck *fuck*-- Will lashed out and caught Scholl's jaw with his fist. Scholl's answering growl was more of a roar.

"You could have been good," he said, tackling Will to the floor, slamming his head against the ground. "You could have behaved. Had a nice Alpha take care of you. But I don't think any Alpha can beat the liar out of you."

Will got one good scratch against Scholl's throat, skin and blood under his nails.

He tried not to think about how they could use that to find his murderer.

Scholl rolled Will onto his stomach, pinning his wrists behind his back. To Will's horror, he'd managed to snag the cuffs, locking them too-tight around Will's wrists.

"I'm going to have you, first," Scholl murmured. "Show you what you'll be missing."

Will whined, kicked out, squirmed, but as soon as Scholl growled again Will was pliant as a rag against the floor. He was shaking. He was too hot. He was freezing. He smelled wrong, wrong, wrong, *wrong*--

"No!" He screamed, wrenching himself free, managing to turn himself on his back again. A hand pressed to his throat and Will bared his teeth. "Don't touch me,"

It came out choked, breathless, barely a sound. This wasn't Will's Alpha, this was an imposter, an intruder. He needed to kick out, break free, hide until his Alpha could--

His head was yanked back, throat bared, and the hand that had choked him was replaced by lips sticky with spit. Will *howled.*

“Stay still,” the man commanded, rough, brutal. His teeth scraped Will’s skin and his howl turned into a pained sobbing cry. No, *no, no, no!* “Take it, you lying little shit, take what you deserve.”

Will jerked hard, freeing himself from the rough grip in his hair and butted upward, catching Scholl against the chin. He hadn’t pulled the strike, it hurt, Will’s head was spinning, his body was screaming, and there was blood.

There was so much blood.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

> *His nest smelled like him, but also like Alpha. The scent set alarm bells off in Will's head, but he ignored them. It was a good scent. It was the scent of the only Alpha Will had ever been attracted to, an Alpha who had kept him safe, who had provided food and shelter and a bed to nest in. Will's instincts craved that sort of safety. He snuggled himself into the bed, sighing happily.*
>
> Serious dub-con in this chapter guys, careful going in!

Will felt a burning under his skin, irrepressible, inescapable. Scholl dropped onto him, heavy between his thighs, unmoved by Will's squirming.

There was so much blood, over Will's face, his chest. He was laying in it, his curls damp and heavy. He didn't understand, he couldn't process. He only understood that Scholl's face was against his throat, that it couldn't be there, that he needed to get out.

And then, slowly, that the scent of furious Alpha had flooded the room. Not sour and unpleasant, like Scholl's scent. This was familiar, this reminded Will of safety and comfort, this was *his* Alpha.

Will went limp, instinct telling him to appease *his* Alpha, and only then was he finally able to realize that Scholl was just as limp atop him.

Will opened his eyes slowly, blinking away the mess, struggling to see without hands to wipe at his face. Above him, Hannibal stood tall, lips pulled back into a snarl.

The blood from Scholl's carotid artery was still dripping from his knife.

Nothing made sense. Will hadn't called Hannibal for help, how had he known Will was in trouble? Why hadn't he called Jack and the team to come? Will was shaking, suddenly desperate to get this foreign body, foreign smell off of him. He struggled, whining helplessly until the weight of Scholl was lifted from him.

He heard the heavy thud of a body falling aside, heard quiet footsteps, curled in on himself.

"Sweet Will," Hannibal murmured, crouching beside him. There was a strangely plastic sound to his movements, but Will didn't think much on it. Couldn't, really, when Hannibal leaned nearer and wiped at his face, bringing his own scent so close. Will squirmed to get closer to that instead. "Sweet boy,"

Then the comforting smell was gone, and Hannibal was rolling Will over, and the panic in his chest was almost physical, almost like a fist to the throat--

Soft hands, warm hands, moved over the cuffs Will had been restrained by. A soft click of a tongue and footsteps walking away once more. Will's addled brain supplied that he was looking for the keys and managed to croak out that he kept them in his bedside drawers.

Every sensation was heightened, his vision seemed to pulse, everything blown out and too-bright, his hearing was picking up the slightest things that usually were entirely irrelevant to Will's life; crickets outside, the scratching of a bug beneath the floorboards, the groan of his house settling on its foundations after such a struggle within it.

And Hannibal.

Hannibal's slow breaths, his slow steps.

Heat had come, overwhelming, all-encompassing. Will's bed was mere feet away, but not his nest. He hadn't had the chance to build a proper one, and now the room was stained with the scent of a predator.

When Hannibal freed him, he was close enough to breathe in, close enough to overwhelm the scent of iron and death. Hannibal helped him to his feet, and Will found himself leaning close, sucking in deep lungfulls, trying to soothe the screaming need in his head.

Hannibal dropped his coat over Will's shoulders, surrounding him entirely in that safe scent. Will's fear, his anxiety, all of it fled now that he was surrounded by the same scent that saturated his nest. Will's eyes closed and he stopped thinking. He was vaguely aware that they were moving, that Hannibal was guiding him into a car with a warm hand on the small of his back, settling him onto a towel in the front seat.

Will rested there, curled up, knees to his chest. He wanted something, but his body had not yet begun to tell him *what* . It was coming, though. That urge that built at the base of his spine. It was building, something huge and encompassing.

Will didn't know how much time passed, but eventually the car door slammed as Hannibal joined him in the front seat. Hannibal called someone. Jack? He told them he was taking Will home, that he was worried for Will's well-being after being attacked. That there had been some blood, but no, he hadn't seen how injured Scholl was before he fled.

Something about that was wrong, something made Will's hackles raise in alarm, but he couldn't focus enough to figure out *what* . How could he care about the *bad* Alpha when he was surrounded by the scent of *his* Alpha.

Will drifted. He lost himself, in a haze as they passed through the checkpoint Jack had set up, as they finished the drive to Hannibal's house.

But as they turned down Hannibal's street, Will's body finally figured out what it wanted. He finally began to *ache* , shoving a hand between his thighs to find that he was saturated with slick and so, so empty.

Beside him, Hannibal growled, a low and deep sound. It wasn't menacing, it was *hungry.* It made Will all the more desperate, shoving three fingers into himself as he rubbed his face against the back of his seat, no doubt smearing blood all over it; wrong blood, blood that wasn't meant to be there.

He wanted to be clean, he needed to be.

But more than that he needed to be in his nest, with his Alpha, *right now.*

"Alpha," he whined, lips parted as he continued to finger himself, as Hannibal turned into his driveway and let the car idle while the garage door opened. "Alpha, *need…"*

"I know," Hannibal purred back, voice barely loud enough to hear. He let the garage close behind them before cutting the ignition and turning to Will. He cupped his face with both hands, pressing their foreheads together. "Beautiful Omega, let me take care of you."

"Please!"

Hannibal pulled away and exited the car, coming around to Will's side so quickly Will wasn't sure if he'd lost time again. But he was being hoisted up in strong arms, pressed up against a wide, familiar chest. Will tasted plastic as he tried to mouthe against the collar of Hannibal's shirt and whined again. He could barely see, could barely think. All he knew was he wanted Hannibal's skin against his own, his mouth on his, his scent all over him.

He missed some time again, because suddenly the light was too bright, too clinical, and he was being placed down against cool tile.

A hush of water against glass, a hiss of it against tile as the stream was redirected. Will didn't feel it against himself yet, all he could feel, all he concentrated on with his entire being, were his fingers, curling within his body, seeking deeper. Will's breath came in pants, his body rocked back and forth as he touched himself.

And then Hannibal was holding him again, skin to skin, and letting his coat drop from Will's shoulders and Will *clung* to him, gasping when the hot water hit his back, pressing himself closer to rut shamelessly against Hannibal's thigh as his hands worked to wash him clean.

He didn't want to get clean. He wanted to fuck.

Hannibal thwarted him at every turn, gently guiding Will's hands away from himself, removing them every time Will tried to get some relief.

"No!" Will cried the third time this happened, tugging uselessly at the wrist that Hannibal held so firmly.

He could no longer smell the copper and angry Alpha that had saturated him in Wolf Trap. All he could smell was Hannibal's clean scent and his own slick. He was *burning* .

"Patience, sweetheart."

“No!” Will yelled again. When Hannibal tried to guide him back under the spray, he sank his teeth into the skin before him, leaving his mark on Hannibal’s shoulder.

Hannibal growled, low and dangerous, causing another pulse of slick to trickle down Will’s thigh. Will bared his throat, submissive but not quite apologetic.

“Alpha,” Will begged, “Alpha, it hurts.”

“Tempting, disobedient little thing.” Even as he said it, Hannibal was turning Will, shoving him towards the ground. Will landed on all fours under the hot spray, reaching back now that his hands were free to shove his fingers back into himself.

Hannibal caught him again, pushing his hand down against the floor with his own atop, anchoring Will and himself in place. Will started to whine again, to whimper, sounds he never made when he was conscious of them, sounds he hated that he even could make because of how needy and desperate they were, how weak they made him sound.

Something shoved up against him, wet knees spread his own wider until Will had to catch himself with his free hand. He coughed, water cascading down his back and into his hair, dripping into the corners of his mouth. A growl and the spray was redirected, hitting the wall to Will’s left and showering him with a much more bearable haze of water.

Before Will could speak, could do anything at all, the head of Hannibal’s cock pressed roughly to him, seeking entry, and Will damn near collapsed in relief.

“Alpha, Alpha, Alpha…” his words came out as specks of water, dropping from lips moving feverish and quick in his desperation, and when Hannibal’s cock caught the rim of his hole and slid in, quick and thick and filling, Will choked on his own words.

“That’s better,” Hannibal purred against him, licking clean water from where it dripped from Will’s hair to his cheek. “Stay still, Will, let me have you.”

Will was happy to obey, now that he was *finally* being sated. Now that the agonizing emptiness had been chased away.

Why *wouldn’t* he want to obey? Why wouldn’t he stay still and obedient for his Alpha, whimpering desperately as he was fucked, knees slipping in puddles on the shower floor?

Will arched his back, shoving his hips back against Hannibal’s with gasping, aching moans. “More,” he demanded. “More, Alpha, it hurts so much.”

“I have you,” Hannibal promised, his chest a solid wall of heat against Will’s back. “Pretty little thing. Be a good boy and you can have whatever you like.”

“I’ll be good,” Will swore, practically drooling as Hannibal’s punishing thrusts threatened to flatten him against the floor of the shower. He had no grib here, palms sliding as each roll of Hannibal’s hips shoved him further and further down.

He’d never felt so full, so warm. Even when he’d let Betas fuck him in college, it hadn’t been like this. Nothing had ever satisfied him before, nothing *could* . He’d needed an Alpha, and

right now, Will couldn't remember why he didn't have one.

"Gonna come," Will gasped. "Alpha, I need to come."

"Come, sweet boy," Hannibal told him, thrusting harder. "Come for me."

And Will did, without the help of Hannibal's hand or his own, he spilled hot and thick over the shower floor and moaned, helpless, as immediately his little cock started to fill again.

He felt Hannibal's knot with every push against him, swelling, growing thicker, growing hot *just for him.* Will wanted it. He needed it. Without it he was certain he would die. And Hannibal felt that, he felt the trembling and the desperation within the little body beneath his own, he felt how much Will ached for him. Like a good Alpha, a perfect Alpha, he could read his Omega like a book.

Hannibal let go of the hand Will had curled against the tile and sat back to grasp Will's hips hard, holding him still.

It took no more than two thrusts for his knot to spread Will wide, and just one more to slip through, filling Will up, plugging him closed. Hannibal purred, pleased and victorious, and sat back, hands still on Will's hips, his knees spread wide where he held Will's legs open. Will's body was milking him hard, muscle convulsions that threatened another delicious orgasm from Hannibal while he was still buried in his Omega.

He sighed, the sound mingling with the white noise of the water around them, and drew a hand up and down Will's back.

He could feel the moment that Will's consciousness returned to him, the moment whatever pleasure haze had held him incoherent slipped enough and let him see. He dug his fingers into Will's hip as the other jerked forward, trying to get away.

"What--"

"Stay still."

"Hannibal?" Will's voice was rough, his movements no longer fluid and lovely but now panicked and sharp. "Hannibal what-- where the fuck am I? What the *fuck are you doing?"*

Hannibal braced a palm between Will's shoulderblades and *shoved* , forcing him down against the cool tile floor. "If you keep moving, you'll hurt yourself," he chided. "You need to wait for my knot to deflate."

Will made a sound, panicked and high, almost all instinct. With his heat haze temporarily lifted, his rationality and fear had returned to the forefront of his mind. No doubt, he was remembering the way he'd begged and pleaded, the memory only adding to his panic. He clenched around Hannibal, breath coming in shaky pants.

"You shouldn't have," Will said. "You knew how I-- You *knew* ."

“Should I have left you in pain?” Hannibal asked, rolling his hips forward to make his point. Will moaned helplessly when Hannibal’s cock rubbed at his prostate, hands clenching in fists against the floor. “Perhaps allowed you to cry and grow hysterical as your heat overwhelmed you?”

Will turned his face away, trembling. He wouldn’t be able to fight his lust for long, and Hannibal was more than happy to encourage it, rubbing at the small of Will’s back with his free hand.

“It will be alright, Will. Just a few more minutes, and then I’ll let you up. You must be sore.”

Will could run all he liked. Hannibal knew where his instincts would take him.

“This is fucked up,” Will whispered. “You can’t do this.”

“You asked me to help you.”

“Not like this, I--”

“You begged me to.”

“Hannibal you *know this is wrong!”* Will said. “You know I wasn’t in my right mind, in any mind, when I said those things!”

“I also knew you were never a Beta,” Hannibal pointed out. “Despite your best efforts, scent blockers, contact lenses, very clever, Will, you’re a very clever boy.”

“Stop that.”

“But no manufactured hormones come close to the real thing. And you left such a sweet scent when you pressed yourself to the clothes in my room.” Hannibal hummed, pleased, when Will tensed to stillness beneath him. “It happens, when you block your own scent long enough. You forget that you leave it behind you. And I smelled you everywhere, remarkable thing. Everywhere except my bed. Too shy, perhaps, but no matter.”

“Hannibal you have to stop,” Will breathed, eyes wide in panic, pulse pounding in his ears. “You have to let me go, this is wrong.”

“It’s nature.”

“I don’t *want it,”* Will hissed. He squirmed forward a bit more, felt Hannibal’s knot give a little and struggled harder. It hurt, enough to feel and wince, but he didn’t tear, and as soon as Will was untethered he crawled frantically to the shower door and out, forgoing a towel as he stumbled to the corridor.

He needed to get out. Hannibal lived in a populated area, even if Will just got out the front door, a naked man on a suburban street would be enough to get people’s attention, to get someone to call for the police. Even here, perhaps especially here, where an Omega was meant to remain chaste and pure for their mate, not seen bare by anyone else.

So Will made for the stairs, a hand catching himself against a wall when he felt his senses pulse out to oblivion again. He had a few moments of coherence before he would be lust addled once more, he had to use them.

He kept his palm to the wall, slid it across the smooth surface until he found a doorframe and swung himself inside.

To his nest, where he would be able to burrow and hide, where he would be safe.

Will's nest had been carefully, lovingly put together, with a nice dip in the center of tall blanket walls, so that he could snuggle in deep and drape a blanket over top, completely out of sight of the rest of the world. The bed wasn't against a wall, as he would have preferred, but he'd managed to keep the nest together anyway. Will curled into it, surrounding himself in the scent of safety.

His nest smelled like him, but also like Alpha. The scent set alarm bells off in Will's head, but he ignored them. It was a good scent. It was the scent of the only Alpha Will had ever been attracted to, an Alpha who had kept him safe, who had provided food and shelter and a bed to nest in. Will's instincts craved that sort of safety. He snuggled himself into the bed, sighing happily.

Yes, this. This was good. This was what he'd been missing, on the floor of the shower. Not enough scent, not enough warmth, nothing to burrow into, nothing to cushion him when his Alpha fucked him screaming.

Will was empty again, fingers between his thighs, searching, seeking, *filling* . Not enough, not deep enough, not big enough. At home, he had toys.

But Will didn't *need* toys. The door opened, and his Alpha's scent grew stronger.

Something told Will to be alarmed. He wasn't. Something told Will to run. He didn't.

He had *chosen* this Alpha, even before his heat had hit. He had marked this Alpha as his own. He wanted him, why wouldn't he?

Hannibal peeled the blanket back, watching WIll with hungry eyes as he shivered in the sudden cool air. "Would you like some help," Hannibal asked, "or would you prefer to do this on your own?"

With his free hand, he offered Will a toy, thick and long with a knot at the base. Will cried when he saw it, whimpering and shaking his head. Didn't his Alpha *want* him?

Hannibal's brows drew together in gentle concern. He tossed the toy aside and watched Will's eyes hone in on him, eating every inch of his body alive from chest to navel, and lower still. He watched Will lick his lips, watched his pulse speed up, his eyes flare golden and wide.

"Present," Hannibal said, watching the way Will went weak, trembled, before scurrying to obey, to get on his knees and press his chest to the bed. He was beautiful. He was made for

this, for Hannibal.

He'd waited, hadn't he? Pretending to be invisible, hiding from the other Alphas in the world until his own came for him, until his own found him. For years Hannibal had brushed aside gentle suggestions that he should find a mate, have a family, raise pups. For years, Hannibal had claimed he had not found his other half. For years, he didn't doubt that someday he would.

Now, climbing into Will's nest behind him, folding himself heavy over Will's slighter form and nuzzling aggressively into his dripping hair, Hannibal knew he'd found him.

Clever, fiery thing.

He'd watched the way Will had tried to fight off Scholl, even handicapped as he had been by the cuffs, even knowing he couldn't stand a chance against him, he had fought. Because he didn't want an Alpha, he wanted *his* Alpha. He wanted Hannibal.

Hannibal slid into Will as easily as he had the first time, but didn't ease Will into it with gentleness. This time, he pounded into Will like he knew his Omega needed; a hand up and around Will's belly, another catching in Will's curls and *tugging,* arching his back even deeper, even more beautifully, presenting Will's pale throat for his teeth.

Will's moans were beautiful, long and needy. He sounded pained, even with Hannibal giving him exactly what he had been craving, but when Hannibal tried to slow down Will reached back and dug claws into his thighs.

"Alpha, *please* ."

"You put this off too long," Hannibal murmured. "Your body has been telling you what it needs, and you've been neglecting it."

"Need," WIll repeated, nodding in agreement. "Alpha, need you."

"You have me, sweet Omega." Hannibal bent over him, pressing his lips to Will's temple. "Open up, let me in. You'll never feel empty again."

Will sobbed, little cock twitching and splashing come over the sheets, bathing the nest in his own scent. Soon, the room would be thick with sex, smelling of the both of them more thoroughly than just the bedding. Soon, Will would be unable to escape him, his instincts latching on to Hannibal as the safest thing in the room.

"Do you want me?" Hannibal whispered in his ear. "Do you want to be taken care of? Do you want someone to keep you safe?"

I can keep myself safe, Will's mind tried to reason with instinct, *I've done it for years, I can do it again--*

"Yes," Will groaned, clenching hard around Hannibal as he teased Will with his knot again. "Please… please don't leave me alone."

“I’ll never let you go,” Hannibal promised, nuzzling him. He licked up behind Will’s ear, catching the lobe between his teeth to tug. “Not ever.”

Will was shaking, body screaming for a knot, mind screaming for escape. He couldn’t voice either desire, he wasn’t able to do anything but keen softly and stretch his arms out in front of himself; submissive, obedient, beautiful.

“Alpha please,” he whispered, nerves on fire, sensation just a little too much, sounds mingling to white noise, colors popping behind closed eyelids.

Will felt Hannibal thrust against him harder, pushing his knot into Will again, slipping it into his willing and pliant body and filling him up.

Will felt teeth against his throat and lifted his chin, moan mingling with Hannibal’s growl as he broke skin.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

> *"What do you want from me, then?" Will asked him.*
>
> *"I want you," Hannibal said, "but I'm happy to acquiesce to your terms in order to get there. I can be patient."*

Awareness returned to Will in fits and spurts.

Whenever the haze of his heat retreated enough for him to feel regret, to feel fear, or rage, Hannibal was there. He draped heavy over Will's back, supporting an Omegan need to be pinned and hidden. He licked at the deep bite he'd left on Will's neck. He slowly coaxed him back under, every time Will tried to reason with himself and squirm away.

Eventually, though, his heat came to an end. Unfortunately for Will, that was only after *days* of acclimating to Hannibal's scent.

And the bite was permanent.

Will woke with a clear head to Hannibal lovingly cleaning his skin with a warm cloth. "Have you returned to me?" He murmured.

"You shouldn't have," Will rasped, though it was of course too late for either of them to handle regrets. And it wasn't like Hannibal had broken a law Will could hold against him; It was generally agreed upon that Alphas were helpless to resist Omegas in heat, something about their need to protect and provide making it impossible to resist cries of pain and begging. It was not assault to help an Omega in need.

He hadn't needed to *bite* Will to sate his heat, but there was nothing either of them could do about that. Will knew what Hannibal had done. *Hannibal* knew what Hannibal had done. But they were both stuck with it now.

"I needed to take care of you," Hannibal said, completely unapologetic. "I have been drawn to you since the moment I saw you, so intelligent, so focused."

Frustrated tears welled up in Will's eyes. "And now you'll make me quit." Technically, Alphas no longer had the legal right to determine whether their Omegas worked or not, regardless of what Quinn and his friends *preferred* to do. But there was no law saying Omegas *had* to be allowed to work dangerous jobs. All Hannibal had to do was tell Jack, and Jack would be well within the rights of the law to fire him.

“No,” Hannibal countered gently, and there was no mockery in his tone, no cruel tease. He set the cloth aside and stroked Will’s hair from his face. It was only then that Will noticed they weren’t in his makeshift nest in the spare room anymore, but were in Hannibal’s room, on his bed.

Will turned away from the touches and buried his face in the pillow, but that hardly helped. It reeked of Hannibal, and Will’s body relaxed entirely unconsciously as he breathed it in.

“You would wilt if you didn’t work,” Hannibal continued, seemingly unoffended by Will’s turning away. He sat up a little higher on the bed to continue petting him. “Your independence, your stubbornness, they light the fire within you that I’m addicted to. I could never be so cruel as to douse it.”

“No,” Will agreed, voice very quiet. “Never so cruel as *that.”*

For a time they were quiet, and then Will sighed, deliberate and sharp, and sat up. He shifted back against the headboard and draped his arms over his raised knees, a sheet covering him. Hannibal didn’t move closer, but he didn’t move away, either. Will swallowed.

“You killed him,” he said. “Scholl. You killed him.”

“Yes.”

No hesitation, no argument. Though Will hadn’t honestly expected any; Hannibal was too confident for that, too self-assured.

“In my home,” Will continued, “to which you weren’t expressly invited. Trespassing and murder in the first, those are heavy charges.” *And rape,* Will wanted to add, *forced bondage.*

“And an Omega working homicide with the FBI,” Hannibal replied with a shrug, tone just as casual. “Not unheard of but certainly unusual. Unwelcome. Distracting. And lying on official FBI applications to get there, too.”

The tension held between them, like a plucked string humming a note. Then Hannibal looked aside, reached over to take up a mug from the bedside table and pass it to Will.

“I made breakfast,” he told him. “Do come down when you feel ready.”

They were at a stalemate, the two of them. Each holding something over the other. What Will knew about Hannibal was worse, could lead to Hannibal’s incarceration.

But what Hannibal knew could ruin Will’s *life* . There had never been another job for him, never anything else he wanted to do. And Hannibal was offering him the opportunity to continue doing it. As well as easing his heats. As disgusted as Will was by what Hannibal had done, it had at least been far less painful than suffering a heat on his own.

“I want boundaries,” Will said, standing in the doorway. “Rules.” Hannibal continued to prod at something on the stove.

“You’ll want your dogs,” Hannibal agreed. “They’ll come here. We can keep the house for getaways, but the drive would be impractical for my work, and you work shorter hours and fewer days.”

Will nodded, though Hannibal couldn’t see it. A longer commute wouldn’t matter as much for him as it would for Hannibal, who worked 9-10 hours a day most days. He could move his classes around to ease his schedule, and it wasn’t like he ever knew how far he’d have to drive for Jack, anyway.

“You don’t touch me outside of my heat,” Will said. “Not unless *I say.* And I want to wait a year for pups. I still have a few years to have them, and I want to know who you are before I raise children with you.”

Hannibal turned off the heat and finally looked up at Will where he stood. Will had come down wrapped in one of Hannibal’s silk dressing gowns, unwilling to enter the spare room to retrieve any of his clothes. The bite on his throat stood out angry red against otherwise smooth skin.

He was radiant.

“A year,” he agreed finally. “But in that time I wish to court you properly.”

Will snorted, shaking his head. “Not like I can say no, is it? You’ve already taken that choice away from me.”

“Would you have?”

“I don’t know,” Will replied pointedly. “And now we never will.”

Quiet for a moment longer, and then Hannibal reached to get two plates for them, piling one high, for Will, and a smaller portion for himself.

“I would like you to keep working,” Hannibal added as he set the table. “I would like it if you cut your hours to four days a week, outside of active cases, but I’ll leave that choice to you.”

“So I can keep house?”

“So you can rest,” Hannibal replied gently. “I don’t expect you to be a house Omega, Will, I didn’t choose you for that. I’m more than content to take care of all of your needs. If you wish to do things around the house you would be most welcome. Otherwise I have a service who comes in to clean.”

Will laughed, he couldn’t help it. Of course Hannibal got someone in to clean his house. He hesitated a moment only before stepping through the kitchen and settling himself at the table with Hannibal. He’d left his coffee upstairs but there was a new mug waiting for him here.

“What do you want from me, then?” Will asked him.

“I want you,” Hannibal said, “but I’m happy to acquiesce to your terms in order to get there. I can be patient.”

Will snorted, a far from happy sound. “Yeah, we’ll see.” As they ate, Will considered his life, now. Mated. Bonded. But not trapped, not yet. He supposed that Hannibal would have this over his head as long as Will put meaning to it, as long as it mattered to him. But he had just as much over Hannibal, in the end. And if worst came to it, a divorce due to one spouse being incarcerated for murder was something even traditionalists could understand.

“Clean up your crime scene,” Will told him after a while, looking at Hannibal as he smiled slightly, tilted his head and preened. “And you might as well meet the dogs.”

Hannibal was true to his word. Will’s dogs were moved within the week, once Hannibal saw that they were well-trained and would need no extra attention to be housebroken.

Will continued to work, moving his classes to *three* days a week in order to cut down on his commute. Thankfully, he didn’t have to cover the bond bite; Alpha/Beta couples still used bites to indulge an Alpha’s possessive nature, and Hannibal was fine with Will using his suppressants so long as he limited them to work days and let his scent flood the house on his days off.

Will thought Jack might have suspected, but if he did, he didn’t say anything.

Will was stubbornly insistent on keeping his nest, though he allowed himself the indulgence of moving the furniture around until the bed was tucked neatly against the wall.

“You can share my bed when I don’t want to punch you in the face,” he said the first time Hannibal suggested they nest in his (bigger, softer) bed.

There were occasional exceptions. Nights when Will had trouble separating himself from the killers he investigated, and he crawled into Hannibal’s bed to soothe himself with the scent of Alpha and the feel of a warm body over his.

Usually, he just stole some of Hannibal’s laundry and stuffed the nest with it, instead.

The first time they slept together after Will’s heat was about two months after Will moved in. He’d come home, taken the dogs to the nearby park to run them out, and returned just before Hannibal did.

“We should drink,” Will told him. Hannibal tilted his head, eyes narrowed.

“Should we?”

“I’ve had a good day,” Will replied, and for once his smile was genuine, warm. Hannibal acquiesced with a goddamn bow, and moved to the cellar to get a bottle that would go with dinner.

After, they shared a nightcap in the study.

“I worked hard on that paper,” Will said, nursing his second -- or was it third? -- scotch as he tucked his socked feet beneath himself on the couch. “You’re in academia, you understand

how something can be entirely impossible to read for anyone outside of your niche and yet still be imbued with your blood, sweat, and tears."

"Of course," Hannibal had taken the chair, rather than the couch, but he eyed the space next to Will once in a while with a hopeful eye. "Will you show it to me?"

Will shook his head, but took another drink, keeping his eye on Hannibal the whole time. "It'll put you to sleep."

"Try me."

So Will had. He'd brought his paper to Hannibal's room, climbing into bed to sit with his legs crossed as he read it to him. He woke up in the morning wrapped in warmth, with Hannibal's weight heavy and reassuring over him as the Alpha continued to sleep. Will indulged in it, didn't struggle free.

When Hannibal didn't immediately lord it over Will over breakfast, or even mention it at all, Will found it easier to climb into bed with him that night as well. And the next. Another two months and Will was getting into bed with Hannibal when *both* of them were awake, rather than waiting for Hannibal's breathing to ease before sneaking in next to him.

Two weeks after *that* , Will began to initiate their snuggling.

It was going well, all things considered. Will was still a ways out from his next heat, so he didn't have to worry that the flurry of warmth he felt around Hannibal was manipulated by his hormones.

He was almost, *almost* considering allowing Hannibal to kiss him goodnight when the next pieces slotted into place.

It was stupid, really, what clued him in. Stupid that it had taken him so long. He knew that sometimes Hannibal liked to go to the opera, and to gatherings after, and Will had always declined to join him, not yet ready to play Good Omega in public. Those outings always kept Hannibal out late, late enough that Will was already asleep when he slipped into bed with him.

And he watched Will eat. Intently. Attention rapt as Will moaned around a bite.

Three bites into pork loin, one night, Will threw his fork down in disgust. "You've got to be fucking kidding me," he growled.

Hannibal actually looked surprised, something had shaken his unshakeable exterior for a change. Maybe it was because despite his allowances, he still saw an Omega as quiet and subdued, not prone to outbursts.

"Is something the matter with your dinner?"

"Yeah, it was fucking alive once."

Hannibal's lips twitched just a little and he inclined his head in agreement. "Meat usually is, before it becomes plated, yes."

"What was his name, Hannibal?" Will asked him, shoving his plate aside and crossing his arms over the table. "This one. I doubt you remember far enough back to tell me about the one before."

Hannibal blinked, eyes slipping just to the side of Will's gaze, for the first time avoiding it rather than chasing it.

"Will, I don't--"

"I work *homicide,* Hannibal. With the FBI. I'm an on call consultant for the Ripper case, did you *really think* I wouldn't find out?"

Hannibal brought a napkin up to gently pat his lips dry. "I had hoped we could discuss it civilly."

"When?" Will asked, brows up. "When we had a family and I couldn't back out? I'll take the pups, Hannibal, if I sense *any* threat to them, even if we have multiple litters, don't ever doubt my conviction in that."

"I never doubt your conviction in anything," Hannibal told him fondly, and Will cursed again, shoving the chair back this time and standing up. "Will you not finish your dinner?"

"No, I'll not fucking finish my dinner, Hannibal, Jesus Christ."

"I could make you something else."

"Ask me again and I'll go get McDonald's," Will threatened. Hannibal flinched.

"Your frustration with me is hardly a reason to ruin your health and well-being."

"You know what's a bigger threat to my well-being than Big Macs?" Will asked, tilting his head. "You, in fucking prison."

Hannibal sighed. "I'm not going to go to--"

"What happens to me if you get caught?" Will interrupted. "What happens to a sullied Omega in your circles, if their Alpha is in jail for murder?"

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. "Would you stay in my circles without me?" He asked curiously.

"I don't *have* any other circles," Will reminded him. "Which means if we have pups, even if I somehow miraculously don't get fired for it, I'm going to need support."

Hannibal watched his mate curiously. Will hated bringing up his dynamic to such a degree that he'd cussed Hannibal out for it before, yet here he was admitting vulnerability, admitting the possibility of their family at risk--

“Don’t give me bedroom eyes, Hannibal, you’re sleeping on the goddamn couch,” Will snapped, finally turning to leave the kitchen. Hannibal heard the bedroom door slap upstairs moments later and sighed. He had no appetite for his meal, now, and it had been such a cathartic kill for him. Pity, but not unsalvageable.

By the time leftovers were in the fridge or frozen, and the dishes were done, Hannibal felt that tug, one that was constant and more earnest the longer he spent time with Will, to go upstairs to him.

He found the door locked.

A knock garnered him a growl from behind it. “I told you you’re sleeping on the couch, don’t even try it, Lecter.”

Both knew Hannibal could take the door off its hinges if he wanted. Both knew Hannibal had the power to get to Will if he wanted to.

He didn’t. He gathered some bedding from the spare room and went to the couch for the night instead. He supposed it was the least he could do.

Will gave him the cold shoulder for about a week before curiosity got the better of him and he started asking Hannibal about his compulsion.

“It isn’t one,” Hannibal replied, pleased to have Will speaking with him again, even if it was about this.

“So what is it, a hobby?”

“I suppose that’s one way to describe it, yes.”

“Get a new hobby,” Will replied. He took a sip of wine and gave Hannibal a look. “I mean it. I won’t be made a pariah in *this* neighborhood if you slip up, and between the dogs and potential pups there is only so much space at Wolf Trap.”

Hannibal hummed thoughtfully. “I have asked you to give up very little, all things considered,” he pointed out.

Will leveled him with a glare. “You’d be asking me to give up a hell of a lot more if you got caught.”

“And if I didn’t get caught? Most serial killers do not.”

“The ones that do often thought they wouldn’t.”

They stared at each other, each contemplating. Will set his wine to the side and held up three fingers. “I get veto power,” he said, ticking one off. “You make an extra, *normal* meal for me so I can decide if I partake or not. And if you feed anything human to our children, I’ll kill you and claim self-defense.”

Hannibal looked at him, head cocked to the side. “This is more amiable than I expected you to be, at this point.”

Will thought of the way he slept soundly for the first time in years, of how he craved Hannibal’s scent when he wasn’t around. Of how utterly, exhaustedly lonely he’d been, certain he’d never find a partner who could accept who he wanted to be.

None of that changed how Hannibal had acquired him, but Will found he didn’t want to return to the way things had been before. “Don’t push your luck,” he said softly. “I can still muster up some rage, if you piss me off.”

“I believe you,” Hannibal said. He held Will’s gaze and blinked first, and then bowed his head in agreement to the terms.

Will didn’t let Hannibal back into the bedroom for another four days, but when he did, he immediately snuggled up against him, nosing Hannibal’s throat, nuzzling him roughly to get his scent all over him. By the time Will settled, Hannibal was purring, eyes half-closed in pleasure, fingers skimming through Will’s curls.

“You’re truly monstrous, you know that?” Will told him softly, sighing when Hannibal’s palm moved to press between his shoulders next. “I think we were meant to find each other.”

In the morning, Will kissed Hannibal awake.

Will’s first heat after their bonding was amazing.

They were starved for each other, both eager and helpless to the rush of it. They left marks and bites and bruises on each other, they somewhat damaged the bed. By the end of it Will was a preening, purring thing, stretching lazily in their nest as Hannibal licked his cheek and nuzzled him.

After that, Will was much more open with physical affection. He no longer held his desires in check like he had before; if he felt horny, he let Hannibal know in no uncertain terms.

Will *truly* relaxed into their home, for the first time. He rearranged furniture. He openly nested, stealing whatever items appealed to him.

He ate from Hannibal’s plate.

Just a few bites, never an entire meal, but Will would occasionally lean over and eat directly from Hannibal’s fork, locking eyes as he did so.

The first time he did it, Hannibal fucked him over the kitchen table.

Will put on a little weight. Not too much, but a comfortable softness that Hannibal thought an Omega *should* have to them. Proof that they were cared for, that they were well-fed and rested. And there was something endearing about that slight curve that Hannibal couldn’t name.

“Perhaps we should go away after your next heat?” Hannibal suggested one night. “The weather will have turned warm, and we’ll already be off work. What’s one extra week?”

Will hummed, snuggled up warm wrapped in Hannibal’s arms. “Okay,” he said, a smile creeping up on him. “Somewhere that’s hot but not muggy.”

“We could get out of the country.”

“I don’t have a passport.”

Hannibal kissed the top of Will’s head and he smiled wider. He knew even before Hannibal said anything that by the time his heat rolled around he would have one.

The disappearance of Peter Scholl went to cold cases after nine months without new leads. Will watched it carefully outside of his regular work, keeping tabs on any information that might appear.

He and Hannibal had gotten their story straight long ago, and had stuck mostly to the truth. Will had been attacked in his own home, and he had managed to wound the man before he ran off into the woods. He hadn’t been seen since. Will was sure that he’d eaten some parts of Peter Scholl way back when Hannibal first started feeding Will properly, but he didn’t like to think about it. He didn’t like to think too much about their elaborate dinners beyond how nice they tasted. Ignorance was bliss, and all that.

As the date for his next heat drew closer, Will thought back on the last almost-year he’d had; how his life had changed and how it almost hadn’t at all. Hannibal did not restrict him in his choices and movements, though he did ‘suggest’ certain things that Will should do. He’d courted him publicly, given Will gifts, doted on him until Will had had to bat him away with his hands for being too clingy.

He’d loved every moment of it.

After his unwilling claiming, he had loved every moment.

He took an extra day off work, giving him time to be home alone and build their nests; one for the heat, and one to recover in after. Will was meticulous, filling it with soft fabrics of different textures and weights, raiding the laundry hamper for mostly-clean shirts. He rolled happily in both nests, and by the time Hannibal got home Will was very eager to see him. He came down the stairs in nothing but his underwear and tugged on Hannibal’s tie to bring him closer.

“You’re late home,” he murmured, rubbing their noses together. Hannibal hummed.

“I stopped to get a treat along the way.”

“Later,” Will told him, touching just the tip of his tongue to Hannibal’s top lip before pulling away, letting his tie slip through loose fingers.

Will fucked Hannibal that night like a man possessed, riding him through three knots by the time cool dawn crawled over the horizon. By the end of it, Will was exhausted and filthy,

stretching lazy and beautiful for Hannibal to look his fill. He rolled onto his stomach, arching his back and giving Hannibal a very good view of his hole, red-rimmed and dripping, before tucking his feet up against himself and dropping a palm to his belly.

It was rounder, firmer than before, and Will grinned, reaching for Hannibal, guiding him to lay down against him.

“It’ll be six months next week,” Will said, smiling wider when Hannibal’s grip tightened against his skin. “I haven’t been on birth control in months, Hannibal, couldn’t you smell it?”

Hannibal looked up at him, adoring, aroused, protective, and Will slid his fingers into his hair, tugging Hannibal up so he could kiss him. Hannibal had noticed a slight tinge to Will’s scent but hadn’t commented on it. He’d enjoyed seeing Will grow fuller, healthier. He remembered Will’s terms, the deal they’d made together.

A year. He had expected that to hold, and yet--

“Monstrous, aren’t I?” Will joked, nose wrinkling as he smiled. His mate leaned close to lick his jaw.

“Remarkable,” he countered, more in love than he’d ever been. “Clever boy.”

End Notes

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